New INDIVIDUALIST Review

THE CONSERVATISM OF
RICHARD M. WEAVER

1. THE SOUTHERN TRADITION
2. THE HUMANITIES IN A CENTURY OF THE COMMON MAN

REFLECTIONS ON THE LOSS OF LIBERTY
GEORGE J. STIGLER

CLASSICAL LIBERALISM AND TRADITION
RALPH RAICO

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NEW INDIVIDUALIST REVIEW

Volume 3 — Number 3

THE CONSERVATISM OF RICHARD M. WEAVER

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The Conservatism of Richard M. Weaver

With the death of Richard M. Weaver last year, American traditionalism lost one of its most respected and sensitive representatives. Besides being a professor of English at the University of Chicago for many years, he was the author of two books which gained him wide regard as a conservative critic of modern society and culture: Ideas Have Consequences *and* The Ethics of Rhetoric. *His works display the distinctive character of his thinking and his concern for values shared by few of his fellow intellectuals.. They have contributed a great deal to the intellectual renaissance of American conservatism in the widest sense. We are pleased, therefore, to be able to present two of his unpublished articles, with the kind permission of his brother-in-law, Mr. Kendall Beaton, and Mr. Louis Dehmlow, the executor of his literary estate.*

The Foundations of Weaver's Traditionalism

LIKE OTHER AMERICAN traditionalists, the late Prof. Richard Weaver expressed an "affection for the proliferating variety and mystery of traditional life, as distinguished from the narrowing conformity and equalitarianism of most radical systems."[1] He envisioned human existence as possessed of an element of mystery, and from that he derived his moral beliefs and his regard for tradition; however, in many respects his ideas were different from those of other conservatives. First, he was oriented not toward the Christian religion, although he certainly respected particulars of its doctrine, but rather toward Platonism. Secondly, he was influenced by the Southern agrarian tradition much more than by the British conservative tradition as expressed by Burke. On some policy questions Weaver agreed with non-conservatives, but his agreement was coincidental, and it followed from his particular ideas, not from actual similarities with other doctrines.

To elaborate, Weaver adhered to the concept of universals which are valid without respect to time or place. He referred to universals as "objective truth" and included standards of human

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[1] Russell Kirk, *The Conservative Mind* (Chicago: Regnery, 1953), p. 8

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conduct and transcendental goals of human action prescribed by Providence. He believed that universals provided the only true knowledge—"the reality which is perceived by the intellect," not "that which is perceived by the senses."[2] As a consequence of these initial postulates, he envisioned the ideal of humanistically developed man: development of all creative human faculties in an orderly fashion. He opposed human development and expression which did not respect order, and thus he valued forms highly. Man, he thought, is a chaotic organism by nature and does not achieve meaning and worth until discipline is imposed upon him and his actions are rendered intelligible; meaningful human action presupposes conformity to some forms. To Weaver forms were qualitative; they provide the measure for human achievement. Universals provide just such forms, or conventions, that alone elevate human existence to a civilized level.

Weaver asserted in his book *Ideas Have Consequences* that the concept of universals has been progressively abandoned by Western man, who adopted in its stead what he termed "modernism." He traced the origin of Western decline to the acceptance of nominalism in the Middle Ages. Nominalism denied that there were universals, and it superceded the logical realism of the scholastics—which was a development of Platonic thought. "For four centuries," Weaver lamented, "every man has not only been his own priest but also his own professor of ethics, and the consequence is an anarchy which threatens even that minimum consensus of value necessary to the political state."[3] From the rejection of universals he traced a growing cultural disorder; man has devalued achievement as he has ignored forms, and the West—inevitably—has waned. He argued that education no longer tends to develop recognition of moral values or to induce intellectual faculties to conform to standards; in many cases man has abandoned such standards and has adopted "pragmatic," "materialistic" ones. He pointed to the same sort of trend away from forms in art and in literature, particularly in the romantic phases of each: "That man is the product of discipline and of forging, that he really owes thanks for the pulling and tugging that enables him to grow—this concept left the manuals of education with the advent of Romanticism."[4] Weaver concluded that intellectually nominalism has produced chaos.

He pointed to indications of decay in human relations. As one, the posture of mass media—sensationalizing the obscene and violating privacy—defies "every definition of humanity." Further, since people value privacy and peaceful reflection less, they are much less intrigued, involved and stimulated by personalities and regard other human beings as mere associates. How to win friends and influence people is one publicized concern; yet: "to one brought up in a society spiritually fused—what I shall call the metaphysical community—the idea of a campaign to win friends and influence people must be incomprehensible. . . . And the art of manipulating personalities obviously presumes a disrespect for personality."[5] A disrespect by man of man has followed only too naturally from a disrespect of universals.

HE INSISTED THAT in political and economic affairs were the most telling evidences of Western decline. The democratising influences of the past century have promoted a primary concern among masses of people for quantity rather than quality. The democratic preoccupation with the wants of majorities entails, he argued, severe restriction of the aristocratic concern for manners, taste, oratorical distinction and political competence. Democratic politicians have typically catered to the crude tastes of majorities and have offered them whatever they have wanted, even at the sacrifice of prudence; aristocratic men of affairs, such as Randolph of Roanoke,

[2] Richard M. Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), page 3
[3] *Ibid*, p. 3
[4] *Ibid*, p. 114
[5] *Ibid*. p. 31

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have, by contrast, tended to act according to canons of reason and restraint. Randolph, in fact, represented to Weaver the ideal representative of American individualism.[6] But democratic writers have mercilessly assailed aristocratic ideas and have eroded their former respectability and influence.

Weaver scorned the consumer democracy of the free market and its necessary concomitant — commercialism. His first objection was that continually fluctuating market values readily convince those who deal with economic affairs that there are no absolutes. On the market some things prevail at one time and others at another time; similarly in the market of ideas, there is no guarantee of permanent dominance for the concept of universals — or for any other one. Second, in the place of concern for universals, a flourishing commercialism offers people material goods; in effect, in Weaver's view, it encourages materialism. Third, the free market allows multitudes of consumers to judge which things will prevail and which will not. That Western man has been "his own priest" and "his own professor of ethics" explains the decline of the West, and so the first premise of the market — the sanction to free choice — is itself a cause of the difficulties of modern man.

Paradoxically, though, Weaver vigorously defended an institution that provides the foundation for the free market; the inviolable right to private property, to him "the last metaphysical right." He so called it because it does not depend upon social usefulness for its acceptance. His valuation of property derives from his view of a natural connection between honor, responsibility and a personal relationship to property. He referred to the "honor of work" and seemed to have in mind the notion that work, honorable in itself, accumulates property, and hence property is merely an extension of one's labor — and of oneself. And people would tend to be more responsible if they have a material stake — real property — in the course of human affairs. Thus, private property enables that sanctuary of privacy which Weaver felt was so essential for worthwhile human development.

THE SECOND POINT in favor of property is that in an age when defenders of universals are few, the institution of private property makes resistance to the ideas and pressures of a majority physically possible; property thus affords minorities the liberty to think and to act as they so choose. As there is danger that the modern and efficient state can achieve close surveillance over the affairs of citizens, and that human development will be smothered, there is crucial need for a means of frustrating such invasion of privacy; Weaver felt that private property was the last bulwark against intrusion, and that as such it acquires particular value. It provides the most hopeful method of salvaging the pluralistic social development which results only from unhampered privacy.

However, Weaver's defense of private property *per se* is not to be construed as a defense of finance capitalism; for by "private" he meant "personal," and corporate property certainly is not owned by individual persons. "Such property is, on the contrary, a violation of the very notion of *proprietas*. For the abstract property of stocks and bonds, the legal ownership of enterprises never seen, actually destroys the connection between man and his substance without which the metaphysical right becomes meaningless. . . . Property in this sense becomes a fiction useful for exploitation and makes impossible the sanctification of work. The property which we defend as an anchorage keeps its identity with the individual."[7] Not only was he apprehensive of encroachments upon privacy by corporations, but he also thought that aggregations of corporate power — property — would entail further enlargement of government and diminuition of liberty. He opposed the institution of corporate property because he thought it stripped property of privacy. Hence, Weaver opposed industrialization which produced urbanization, the extension of

[6] Weaver, "Two Types of American Individualism," in *Modern Age*, vol. 7, Spring, 1963, pp. 119-134

[7] *Ideas Have Consequences*, p. 133

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the market and economic concentration. Weaver's solution to the problem of governmental and corporate power was to have "distributive ownership of small properties: these take the form of independent farms, of local businesses, of homes owned by the occupants, where individual responsibility gives significance to prerogative over property."[8]

FROM THE IDEAS which we have discussed followed directly the kind of tradition which Weaver revered: the agrarianism of the Old South. It was infused with aristocratic qualities — education, refinement, honor, provincialism. Each person owned property, ideally, and he mingled his own labor with the soil. His environment was peaceful and reflective, and his spiritual concerns were uninterrupted by the strains of an urban, commercial and materialistic civilization. Schools provided true education — not mass instruction — that enabled a person to develop restraint, taste and refinement. Such a way of life was honorable, but it was, again, possible only in a society in which each person owned some property.

Weaver aimed "to draw a line between respect for tradition because it is tradition and respect for it because it expresses a spreading mystery too great for our knowledge to compass."[9] "There is something in its [the South's] sultry languor," he continued, "and in the stubborn humanism of its people, now battling against the encroachments of industrialism — and with so little knowledge of how to battle — which tells me that for better or for worse this is my native land."[10]

IN SPITE OF the atypical nature of some of his basic ideas, Weaver was, after all, a part of the traditionalist movement. His thought, therefore, is to be distinguished from that of writers oriented in a libertarian direction, who are the heirs of the classical liberal tradition. He was in the first instance concerned with societal wholes rather than with individuals. He valued highly a "sense of community": loyalty by a people to a set of traditional ideas and beliefs. And it was from his concern with wholes that his regard for liberty followed.

But he valued "rational liberty," not liberty *qua* liberty such as J. S. Mill once did.[11] Weaver opposed the notion of progress which aroused enthusiasm in such writers as Macaulay and Spencer. While agreeing with certain liberals on some matters — such as with Acton's anti-democratic attitudes — his traditionalist point of view was radically different from a liberal one.

His major contribution, it appears to me, was that of being an effective spokesman for a point of view too little articulated today, and thus a contributor to the vigorous libertarian-traditionalist dialogue.

JAMES POWELL

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[8] *Ibid*, p. 133

[9] Weaver, "Up from Liberalism," in *Modern Age*, vol. 3, Winter, 1958-59, p. 28

[10] *Ibid*, p. 28

[11] In another contribution to *Modern Age* he asserted that cultural freedom is defensible because man by nature must develop a culture, and culture cannot develop in a repressed environment. Hence, culture has rights, *e.g.*,: "For the freedom of cultures as wholes, two rights must be respected: the right of cultural pluralism where different cultures have developed, and the right of cultural autonomy in the development of a single culture. In a word, cultural freedom on this plane starts with the acknowledgement of the right of a culture to be itself," from "The Importance of Cultural Freedom" in *Modern Age*, vol. 6, Winter, 1961-62. We should note that this line of argument is radically different from that of any one of a number of liberals who talk in terms of individual rights and development. The issue of cultural freedom would seem to be another instance of *coincidental* agreement between a conservative and a liberal view.

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I. THE SOUTHERN TRADITION

MANY YEARS AGO the historian Francis Parkman wrote a passage in one of his narratives which impresses me as full of wisdom and prophecy. After a brilliant characterization of the colonies as they existed on the eve of the Revolution, he said, "The essential antagonism of Virginia and New England was afterwards to become, and to remain, an element of the first influence in American history. Each might have learned much from the other, but neither did so til, at last, the strife of their contending principles shook the continent." If we take Virginia as representing the South and New England as representing the North, as I think we may fairly do, we can say that this situation continues in some degree down to the present. Each section had much to learn from the other: neither was willing to learn anything and that failure produced 100 years ago the greatest tragedy in American history. Today it appears in political friction, social resentment, and misunderstanding of motives despite encouraging signs of growing amity.

This amity will clearly depend upon an appreciation, which Parkman found so sadly lacking, of what each has to offer. You certainly never get anywhere in mutual understanding among peoples or nations by assuming in advance that the other fellow has nothing whatever to offer. We would never think of assuming that in the case of the English or the French or the Chinese, or even the American Indians. But I only report what I have observed if I say that there appears a tendency on the part of a good many Americans to assume that the American South has nothing to offer—nothing worth anybody's considering. That is a proposition in itself, and it needs to be examined in the light of evidence.

My principal theme, therefore, will be those things the South believes it has contributed to this great, rich, and diversified nation and which it feels have some right to survive and to exert their proportionate influence upon our life.

Before I can do this, however, I shall have to say something about what the South is—what makes it a determinate thing, a political, cultural, and social entity, which by the settlement of 1865 is going to be part of the union indefinitely.

IT IS VIRTUALLY A TRUISM in American political thinking that the South has been a kind of nation within a nation. You have no doubt learned that "nation" is a hard thing to define in any ultimate sense. But taking the term in the practical, working sense usually employed, we can say that there are a number of evidences of Southern nationalism. The political unity of the section often referred to by the phrase "the solid South" is a fact of considerable notoriety. Its ideological unity, or its community of belief about certain ideas, certain institutions, and certain figures of history is only a little behind the political unity. And the unity of its culture, expressed in its way of life, it speech, its cookery, and its manners, has maintained itself surprisingly in the face of a variety of conditions on the inside and considerable pressure from the outside. I am

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inclined to think that Southern culture shows a degree of centripetalism, or orientation toward a center, which is characteristic of all high cultures.

In dealing with the factors which have produced this unity of thought and feeling in the South, it seems best to take them in the order of their historical emergence.

The first step toward understanding the peculiarities of the Southern mind and temper is to recognize that the South, as compared with the North, has a European culture—not European in the mature or highly developed sense, but more European than that which grew up north of the Potomac and Ohio rivers, in several respects, even more European than that of New England.

The South never showed the same interest in seceding from European *culture* that the North and West showed. It played an important and valiant part in the Revolution, but this was a political separation. After the Revolution it settled down quite comfortably with its institutions, modelled on eighteenth century England. A few stirrings of change, I believe, there were in Virginia, but not enough to alter the patterns of a landowning aristocracy. While Emerson in New England was declaiming, "We have listened too long to the courtly muses of Europe," the South was contentedly reading Sir Walter Scott, not, as Russell Kirk has shrewdly pointed out in his *The Conservative Mind,* just because it liked romance but because in Sir Walter Scott it found the social ideals of Edmund Burke. And Burke is one of the great prophets of conservative society. The European complexion of Southern culture showed itself also in other ways. It showed itself in the preservation of a class society—one might more truly say in the creation of a class society—for very few who settled in the South had any real distinction of family. It appeared in the form of considerable ceremonial in dress and manners. It was manifested in the *code duello,* with all its melancholy consequences. It appeared in the tendency of Southern families who could afford it to send their sons to Europe for their education—even Edgar Allen Poe received some of his schooling in England. And it appeared in a consequential way in their habit of getting their silver, their china, their fine furniture and the other things that ornamented Southern mansions from Europe in exchange for their tobacco, cotton and indigo.

Whether the South was right or wrong in preserving so much of the European pattern is obviously a question of vast implications which we cannot go into here. But I think it can be set down as one fact in the growing breach between South and North. The South retained an outlook which was characteristically European while the North was developing in a direction away from this—was becoming more American, you might say.

There are evidences of this surviving into the present. A few decades ago when Southern Rhodes scholars first began going to England, some of them were heard to remark that the society they found over there was much like the society they had left behind. England hardly seemed to them a foreign country. This led to attempts by some of them to reassert the close identity of Southern and Western European culture, to which I expect to refer again later.

THE SECOND GREAT FACTOR in the molding of Southern unity and self-consciousness was the Civil War. Southerners are sometimes accused of knowing too much about the Civil War, of talking too much about it, of being unwilling to forget it. But there are several reasons why this rent looms very large in the Southerner's memory, and why he has little reluctance in referring to this war, although it was a contest in which he was defeated.

To begin with, Southerners, or the great majority of them, always have believed that their part in this war was an honorable one. Far from regarding themselves as rebels, they felt that they were loyal to the original government, that is to say, they believed that they were fighting to defend the government as it was laid down at Philadelphia in 1787 and as recognized by various state ordinances of ratification. This was a

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government of restricted power, commissioned to do certain things which the states could not do for themselves, but strictly defined as to its authority. The theory of states' rights was a kind of political distributism which opposed the idea of a powerful centralized government. The Southern theory then as now favored the maximum amount of self-determination by the states and it included, as a kind of final guarantee that states' rights would be respected, the principle of state sovereignty, with its implied right of secession.

In the Southern view, it was the North that was rebelling against this idea which had been accepted by the members of the Constitutional Convention in 1787. Or to put it in another way, the North was staging a revolution, the purpose of which was to do away with this older concept of the American government. The South refused to go along with the revolution, invoked the legal safeguards which it believed to exist, and then prepared to defend itself by force. You may recall that the late historian Charles A. Beard found enough substance in this to call the Civil War "the Second American Revolution" in his *Rise of American Civilization*. Thus in this second American Revolution the Northerners were in the role of patriots, the Southerners in the role of English, if we keep our analogy with the Revolutionary War.

In all great crises of history where you have a legal principle challenged by a moral right, you find people flocking to both standards. The one side says it believes in the duty of upholding the law. The other side says it believes in the imperative necessity of change, even at the expense of revolution. Though the Civil War may not look quite so simple to us now, this is the way many people saw it. A number of years ago, Gerald Johnson wrote an ingenious little book on Southern secession, in which he referred to it as the struggle between the law and the prophets. The South had the law and the North had the prophets, in the form of the abolitionists and also of the advocators, both heard and unheard, of a strong central government, unimpeded by theories of states' rights.

The legal aspects of an issue which has been so long decided can now have only academic interest. But if any of you wish to see a statement of the South's legal position on state sovereignty and secession, the best source is a little book by a man named Bledsoe—A. T. Bledsoe —*Is Davis A Traitor?* Bledsoe was a Kentuckian, and he brought to the task of writing this defense an interesting set of qualifications. He was a lawyer, a professor of mathematics, and for ten years he had been a colleague of Lincoln at the bar of Springfield. Also—and probably this is pertinent to mention, since we are talking here about a metaphysical debate—he had written a book-length refutation of Jonathan Edwards' *Freedom of the Will.* I do not know whether this is true or not, but it has been said that the appearance of *Is Davis A Traitor?* in 1866, was one of the things that made the North decide not to bring Davis to trial. At any rate, the failure to bring Davis to trial was naturally taken by the South as a sign that the North's legal case was too weak to be risked in court.

These are the chief things causing Southerners to feel that, whatever the claims of moral right and wrong, they had the law on their side.

Now we come to the fact of the Civil War itself. It was impossible that a struggle as long and bitter as this should not leave deep scars. Americans, particularly those of the present generation, are prone to forget the magnitude of this civil conflict. The United States lost more men from battle wounds and disease in the Civil War than in any other war of its history, including the Second World War. The battle front stretched from Pennsylvania to New Mexico, and included also the seven seas. A good many of the wars of history have been decided by two or three major battles. In our Civil War at least eighteen battles must be accounted major by reason of the number and resources involved. The minor battles run into scores, and the total number of engagements—somebody once counted them up—is as I recall, something more than 2200. Of this eighteen major battles you might call five or six "critical" in a sense that, with a more decisive result, they might have ended the war right there or have turned it in

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favor of the side which eventually lost. I would include in my list of critical battles Shiloh, the Seven Days, Sharpsburg, Gettysburg, and Chickamauga. So you can see it was really a knock-down drag-out fight.

THERE IS A FURTHER FACT to be noticed in discussing the effect of this war. Nearly the whole of it was fought on Southern soil. With the exception of the Gettysburg campaign, and John Hunt Morgan's raids into Indiana and Ohio, and the small but famous St. Albans raid in Vermont—a group of Confederates in disguise came down from Canada, shot up the little town of St. Albans in Vermont, took the bank deposits and got back across the border —the North was physically untouched. There is a great difference between reading about a war your boys are fighting 500 miles away, and having the war in your midst, with homes being burned, farms being stripped, and your institutions being pulled to pieces. I'll bet any Japanese or German today will testify to this. The war was much more a reality to the people of the South than to those of the North, and it has remained such down to the present.

A natural question to come up at this point is, why should anybody care to remember or write histories about a war which left his country a hollow shell? In order to explain this, I shall have to tell you something else from the Southern credo, something that goes along with this faith in the legal case. It has been a prime factor in preserving Southern morale and in maintaining that united front of the South which I am afraid has been such a vexation to the rest of the country. And the only way I can really tell this is by an anecdote, even though I have to explain the anecdote.

The story goes that a ragged Confederate soldier was trudging his way home from Appomattox. As he was passing through some town, somebody called out to him by way of taunting. "What'll you do if the Yankees get after you?" And his answer was, "They aren't going to bother me. If they do, I'll just whip 'em again." The point of the anecdote, which may need to be explained, is that the answer was at least half serious. It was a settled article of belief with the Southern soldiers—echoed in numberless Confederate reunions—that although they had lost the war, they had won the fighting—that individually they had proved themselves the equal, if not the superior of their adversary and that the contest had finally been decided by numbers. There is no point in going into the merits of the argument here. But it is easy to see how, right or wrong, it had a great effect in preserving Southern pride, and even in maintaining a spirit of defiance which to this day characterizes a good bit of Southern policy.

It also helps to explain why the South has written so voluminously about the war, and why in libraries today, for example, you can find a biography of practically every Confederate General of any eminence whatever, and sometimes three or four. A quick check of the card files in Harper library reveals ten full-length biographies of William Tecumseh Sherman, but fourteen of Stonewall Jackson, plus biographies of Stoneman, Pleasanton, Grierson, Bedford, Forrest, Stuart, and a definitive biography of Lee by D. S. Freeman; but no definitive biography of Grant. The remark has been made that in the Civil War the North reaped the victory and the South the glory. If you consult the literature of the subject very extensively you find a certain amount of truth in that.

Evidently there was enough substance in the legend to nourish the martial tradition of the South, and to support institutions like VMI, the Citadel and the A & M College of Texas, which do not have counterparts in other sections of the country.

This brings the story down to Reconstruction; which somebody has described as "a chamber of horrors into which no good American would care to look." If that is an exaggeration, it still seems fair to say that this was the most dismal period of our history—a bitter, thirty-year sectional feud in which one side was trying to impose its will on the other, and the other was resisting that imposition with every device of policy,

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stratagem and chicanery that could be found. We must realize that no people willingly accepts the idea of being reconstructed in the image of another. That is, in fact, the ultimate in humiliation, the suggestion that you must give up your mind, your inherited beliefs and you way of life in favor of that of your invaders. There was a critical period when, if things had been managed a little worse, the South might have turned into a Poland or an Ireland, which is to say a hopelessly alienated and embittered province, willing to carry on a struggle for decades or even centuries to achieve a final self-determination. That was largely forestalled by the wisdom of a few Northern leaders. The work of Lincoln toward reconciliation is well known but that of Grant, at Appomattox and also later, I think has never been sufficiently appreciated. And the act of Lee in calling for reunion once the verdict of battle has been given was of course of very great influence.

IT WAS AN immeasurable calamity that Lincoln was not allowed to live and carry out his words in the lofty and magnanimous spirit which his speeches reflect. He was himself a product of the two sections, a Kentuckian by birth, an Illinoisian by adoption. He understood what had gone into the making of both. As it was, things were done which produced only rancor, and made it difficult for either side to believe in the good faith of the other. It is unfortunate but it is true that the Negro was forced to pay a large part of the bill for the follies of Reconstruction.

By all civilized standards the period was dreadful enough. George Fordt Milton has called his history covering those years *The Age of Hate*. Claude Bowers has called this *The Tragic Era*. If you desire a detailed account of what the South experienced in these years probably the best source to go to is *Why the Solid South, Reconstruction and Its Results*, (ed. Hilary Herbert) by a group of Southern leaders, including a number of governors of states. This is of course, a Southern view, but it tells you from the inside something about the financial, political, and social chaos that prevailed in those years.

Unquestionably Reconstruction did something to deepen the self-consciousness of the Southern people, to make them feel less American rather than more so. They became the first Americans ever to be subject to invasion, conquest, and military dictation. In estimating the Southern mind it is most important to realize that no other section of America has been through this kind of experience. In fact it is not supposed to be part of the American story. The American presents himself to the world as ever progressing, ever victorious, and irresistible. The American of the South cannot do this. He has tasted what no good American is supposed ever to have tasted, namely the cup of defeat. Of course, that experience is known to practically all the peoples of Europe and of Asia. This circumstance has the effect of making the mentality of the Southerner again a foreign mentality—or a mentality which he shares in respect to this experience with most of the peoples of the world but does not share with the victorious American of the North and West. He is an outsider in his own country. I have often felt that the cynicism and Old-World pessimism which the rest of the country sometimes complains of in the South stems chiefly from this cause. The Southerner is like a person who has lost his innocence in the midst of persons who have not. William A. Percy, going from a plantation on the Mississippi Delta to the Harvard Law School found that Northern boys were "mentally more disciplined" but "morally more innocent" than Southern boys. His presence is somehow anomalous; he didn't belong.

It is sometimes said, with reference to these facts, that the South is the only section of the nation which knows the meaning of tragedy. I am inclined to accept that observation as true and to feel that important things can be deduced from it. Perhaps there is nothing in the world as truly educative as tragedy. Tragedy is a kind of ultimate. When you have known it, you've known the worst, and probably also you have had a glimpse of the mystery of things. And if this is

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so, we may infer that there is nothing which educates or matures a man or a people in the way that the experience of tragedy does. Its lessons, though usually indescribable, are poignant and long remembered. A year or so ago I had the temerity to suggest in an article that although the South might not be the best educated section in the United States, it is the most educated—meaning that it has an education in tragedy with which other educations are not to be compared, if you are talking about realities. In this sense, a one-gallon farmer from Georgia, sitting on a rail fence with a straw in his mouth and commenting shrewdly on the ways of God and man—a figure I adopt from John Crowe Ransom—is more educated than say a salesman in Detroit, who has never seen any reason to believe that progress is not self-moving, necessary and eternal. It would seem the very perverseness of human nature for one to be proud of this kind of education. But I do believe it is a factor in the peculiar pride of the Southerner. He has been through it; he knows; the others are still living in their fool's paradise of thinking they can never be defeated. All in all, it has proved difficult to sell the South on the idea that it is ignorant.

In a speech made around the turn of the century, Charles Aycock of North Carolina met the charge of ignorance in a way that is characteristic in its defiance. Speaking on "The Genius of North Carolina Interpreted," he said,

> Illiterate we have been, but ignorant never. Books we have not known, but men we have learned, and God we have sought to find out. [North Carolina has] nowhere within her borders a man known out of his township ignorant enough to join with the fool in saying "There is not God."

You will note here the distinction made between literacy and knowledge—a distinction which seems to be coming back into vogue. You will observe also the preference of knowledge of men over knowledge of books—this is where our Southern politicians get their wiliness. And you will note finally the strong emphasis upon religiosity.

(It has also been claimed that this tragic awareness perhaps together with the religiosity is responsible for the great literary productiveness of the South today. That is a most interesting thesis to examine, but it is a subject for a different lecture.)

For a preliminary, this has been rather long, but I have felt it essential to present the South as a concrete historical reality. One of the things that has prevented a better understanding between North and South, in my firm belief, is that to the North the South has never seemed quite real. It has seemed like something out of fiction, or out of that department of fiction called romance. So many of its features are violent, picturesque, extravagant. With its survivals of the medieval synthesis, its manners that recall bygone eras, its stark social cleavages, its lost cause, its duels, its mountain flask, its romantic and sentimental songs, it appears more like a realm of fable than a geographical quarter of these United States. Expressed in the refrain of a popular song, "Is It True What They Say About Dixie," the thought seems to be that the South is a kind of never never land from which the nation draws most of its romance and sentiment, but to which, for this very reason, you do not assign the same weight in the equation as you do to the other sections. Well the sentiment and the romance are there, in considerable measure, but there is a substratum of reality too. People are born and die in the same way as elsewhere: if you prick them, they bleed. The vast majority of them have to work for a living and in a hot climate too. The South also votes in national elections. For this reason, especially, it is important that the nation should see it as a reality and not a fiction, understand it better, both with respect to its likenesses and its differences. (And I certainly would assent to the proposition that the South ought to understand the nation better.) In the foregoing I have tried to present to you something of the peculiar history and formation of the South. In the time remaining I shall try to explain some of the peculiar—in the sense of being fairly distinct in this country—attributes of mind and outlook. It is

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scarcely necessary to add that these have many connections with that history.

I shall begin by saying something about the attitude toward nature. This is a matter so basic to one's outlook or philosophy of life that we often tend to overlook it. Yet if we do overlook it, we find there are many things coming later which we cannot straighten out.

Here the attitudes of Southerners and Northerners, taken in their most representative form, differ in an important respect. The Southerner tends to look upon nature as something which is given and something which is finally inscrutable. This is equivalent to saying that he looks upon it as the creation of a Creator. There follows from this attitude an important deduction, which is that man has a duty of veneration toward nature and the natural. Nature is not something to be fought, conquered and changed according to any human whims. To some extent, of course, it has to be used. But what man should seek in regard to nature is not a complete dominion but a *modus vivendi*—that is, a manner of living together, a coming to terms with something that was here before our time and will be here after it. The important corollary of this doctrine, it seems to me, is that man is not the lord of creation, with an omnipotent will, but a part of creation, with limitations, who ought to observe a decent humility in the face of the inscrutable.

THE NORTHERN ATTITUDE, if I interpret it correctly, goes much further toward making man the center of significance and the master of nature. Nature is frequently spoken of as something to be overcome. And man's well-being is often equated with how extensively he is able to change nature. Nature is sometimes thought of as an impediment to be got out of the way. This attitude has increasingly characterized the thinking of the Western world since the Enlightenment, and here again, some people will say that the South is behind the times, or even that it here is an element of the superstitious in this regard for nature in its originally given form. But however you account for the attitude, you will have to agree that it can have an important bearing upon one's theory of life and conduct. And nowhere is its influence more decisive than in the corollary attitude one takes toward "Progress."

One of the most widely received generalizations in this country is that the South is the "unprogressive section." If it is understood in the terms in which it is made, the charge is true. What is not generally understood, however, is that this failure to keep up with the march of progress is not wholly a matter of comparative poverty, comparative illiteracy, and a hot climate which discourages activity. Some of it is due to a philosophical opposition to Progress as it has been spelled out by industrial civilization. It is an opposition which stems from a different conception of man's proper role in life.

This is the kind of thing one would expect to find in those out-of-the-way countries in Europe called "unspoiled," but it is not the kind of thing one would expect to find in America. Therefore I feel I should tell you a little more about it. Back about 1930, at a time when this nation was passing through an extraordinary sequence of boom, bust, and fizzle there appeared a collection of essays bearing the title *I'll Take My Stand.*[1] The nature of this title, together with certain things contained, caused many people to view this as a reappearance of the old rebel yell. There were, however, certain differences. For one thing, the yell was this time issuing from academic halls, most of the contributors being affiliated in one way or another with Vanderbilt University. For another, the book did not concentrate upon past grievances, as I am afraid most Southern polemic has done, but rather upon present concerns. Its chief question was, where is industrialism going anyhow, and what are its gifts, once you look them in the mouth? This book has since become famous as "The Agrarian Manifesto." As far as content goes, I think it can fairly be

[1] P. Smith, *I'll Take My Stand; the South and the Agrarian Tradition, by 12 Southerners* (New York: Harper Brothers, 1930).

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styled a critique of progress, as that word is used in the vocabulary of modern publicity and boosting.

Although the indictment was made with many historical and social applications, the center of it was philosophical; and the chief criticism was that progress propels man into an infinite development. Because it can never define its end, it is activity for the sake of activity, and it is making things so that you will be able to make more things. And regardless of how much of it you have, you are never any nearer your goal because there is no goal. It never sits down to contemplate, and ask, what is the good life? but rather assumes that material acquisition answers all questions. Language something like this was employed by John Crowe Ransom, one of the most eloquent of the spokesmen, in his chapter, "Reconstructed but Unregenerate."

"Progress never defines its ultimate objective but thrusts its victims at once into an infinite series," Mr. Ransom said. And he continued, "Our vast industrial machine, with its laboratory center of experimentation, and its far-flung organs of mass production, is like a Prussianized state which is organized strictly for war and can never consent to peace."[2] "Industrialism," he declared, "is rightfully a menial, of almost miraculous cunning, but no intelligence; it needs to be strongly governed, or it will destroy the economy of the household. Only a community of tough conservative habit can master it."[3] The South, Mr. Ransom felt, was such a community, and he went on to praise it for its stability, its love of established things, its veneration of the past—for all of those qualities which are generally thought to make up Southern backwardness. Mr. Stark Young, the well-known novelist and theatrical critic, defended the ideal of aristocratic indulgence and aristocratic leadership. "We can put one thing in our pipes and smoke it," he wrote, "there will never again be distinction in the South until—somewhat contrary to the doctrine of popular and profitable democracy—it is generally clear that no man worth anything is possessed by the people, or sees the world under a smear of the people's wills and beliefs."[4] There are many other pungent passages which might be quoted, but these should be enough to show that it was a militant book. As you can see, its bias was anti-industrial, anti-scientific, anti-popular. It defended the values of a culture rooted in the soil. Just what the effect was, however, is hard to estimate. But no one conversant with Southern history and culture will deny that it expressed some feelings which survive pretty strongly into the present and which may be found any where from the mansions of the *nouveau riche* in Atlanta to the mountain cabins of East Tennessee and Kentucky.

ANOTHER CARDINAL POINT, touched on here and there in the volume, is the Southerner's attachment to locality. The Southerner is a *local* person—to a degree unknown in other sections of the United States. You might say that he has lived by the principle that it is good for a man to have a local habitation and a name; it is still better when the two are coupled together. In olden days a good many Southerners tried to identify their names and their homes: thus we read in history of John Taylor of Caroline, of Charles Carroll of Carrollton; of Robert Carter of Nomini Hall; of the Careys of Careysbroke; of the Lees of Westmoreland County. With the near liquidation of the old land-owning aristocracy this kind of thing became too feudal and fancy to keep up. Nevertheless, something of it remains in a widespread way still; the Southerner always thinks of himself as being from somewhere, as belonging to some spot of earth. If he is of the lucky few, it may be to an estate or a plantation; if not that, to a county; and if not to a county at least to a state. He is a Virginian, or he is a Georgian in a sense that I have never encountered in the Middle West—though the Indiana Hoosiers may offer a fair approximation. Very often the mention of a name in an introduction will elicit the remark, "That is a Virginia

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 8.
[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 15-16.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 338.

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name" or "That's a South Carolina name," whereupon there will occur an extensive genealogical discussion. Often this attachment to a locale will be accompanied by a minute geographical and historical knowledge of the region, a loving awareness of details, of the peculiar physiognomy of the place. Andrew Nelson Lytle once complained in an article that in the world since 1914, nobody has known who he was or where he was from. The South has certainly felt the pressure toward rootlessness and anonymity—which are sometimes named as among the chief causes of modern psychic disorders—but I believe it has resisted the pressure better than most parts of the United States and Europe. It still looks among a man's credentials for where he is from, and not all places, even in the South, are equal. Before a Virginian, a North Carolinian is supposed to stand cap in hand. And faced with the hauteur of an old family of Charleston, South Carolina, even a Virginian may shuffle his feet and look uneasy.

THE PRIDE OF local attachment is a fact which has two sides; it is a vice and a virtue. It may lead to conceit, complacency, and ignorance of the world outside. It frequently does lead to an exaggerated estimate of the qualities and potentialities of the particular region or province. The nation as a whole is acquainted with it in the case of Texans, who have developed this Southern attribute in an extreme degree. I was teaching out in Texas about the time we were ending the Second World War. A jocular remark that was passed around with relish was: "I know we are going to win the war now. Texas is on our side." It was a fair gibe at Texan conceit.

But on the other side, provincialism is a positive force, which we ought to think about a long while before we sacrifice too much to political abstractionism. In the last analysis, provincialism is your belief in yourself, in your neighborhood, in your reality. It is patriotism without belligerence. Convincing cases have been made to show that all great art is provincial in the sense of reflecting a place, a time, and a *Zeitgeist*. Quite a number of spokesmen have pleaded with the South *not* to give up her provincialism. Henry Watterson, a long-time editor of the Louisville *Courier Journal*, told an audience of Kentuckians, "The provincial spirit, which is dismissed from polite society in a half-sneering, half-condemnatory way is really one of the forces of human achievement. As a man loses his provincialism he loses, in part, his originality and, in this way, so much of his power as proceeds from his originality." He spoke caustically of "a miserable cosmopolitan frivolity stealing over the strong simple realism of by-gone times." He summed up by asking, "What is life to me if I gain the whole world and lose my province?"

Thirty years later Stark Young, writing in the agrarian manifesto to which I referred earlier, pursued the same theme. "Provincialism that is a mere ramification of some insistent egotism is only less nauseous than the same egotism in its purity . . . without any province to harp on. But provincialism proper is a fine trait. It is akin to a man's interest in his own center, which is the most deeply rooted consideration that he has, the source of his direction, health and soul. . . . People who give up their own land too readily need careful weighing, exactly as do those who are so with their convictions."[5] What often looks like the Southerners' unreasoning loyalty to the South as a place has in this way been given some reasoned defense. Even Solomon said that the eyes of a fool are in the ends of the earth. One gives up the part for the whole only to discover that without parts there is no whole. But I have said enough about the cultural ideal of regionalism. If you would be interested in a book which brings these thoughts together in a systematic treatment, see Donald Davidson's *The Attack on Leviathan*.

Despite what I have said about this love for the particular, which is another name for love of the concrete, the Southern mind is not by habit analytical. In fact the Southern mind has little capacity

[5] *Ibid.*, pp. 343-345.

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for analysis and I think one could almost say that it is opposed on principle to analysis. There seems to exist a feeling that you do not get at the truth of a thing—or that you do not get at a truth worth having—by breaking the thing in pieces. This explains undoubtedly why the South has always done so poorly in business and technology, which demand analytical methods. The Southern mind is, on the other hand, synthetic and mythopoeic—it seeks out wholes, representations, symbols. Especially is it mythopoeic, or given to the creation of myths and stories. The American tall tale was a creation of the Southern frontier. And one cannot go into a mountain community in Eastern Kentucky or to a plantation in say, Alabama, and open his ears to the talk of the people without having borne in upon him an amazing wealth and variety of stories—dramatic, intense, sometimes grotesque. As a mine of material for the creative writer there is nothing to compare with it anywhere else in America. I have heard people ask where William Faulkner gets that stuff that goes into his novels—whether he dreams it in nightmares, and so on. No one who had spent any time in Mississippi with his ears open would have to ask that question. He would know to what extent incidents and stories of this kind enter into the imaginative life of Mississippians. This mythopoeic or poetic —in the Aristotelian sense — faculty is surely behind the present flowering of the Southern novel and short story. It has already given us an interesting body of fiction, and it may one day give us a great literature. The South is not so much sleeping as dreaming, and dreams sometimes beget creations!

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FINALLY SOMETHING MUST be said about the South's famous conservatism — famous or infamous, depending upon your point of view. It is certainly a significant fact, but it has not gone wholly uncriticized at home. Walter Hines Page, growing up as a young man in North Carolina, spoke bitterly of what he called "an unyielding stability of opinion." Having failed in his effort to do anything with it, he declared that "the only successful rebellion was an immediate departure." He then fled North, to become editor of *The Atlantic Monthly* and eventually our ambassador to Britain during the Wilson Administration. Ellen Glasgow satirized it in her urbane novels of Virginia life. Thomas Wolfe took a few hefty swings at it in his description of old Catawba. And there have been others who have complained of a stifling uniformity of thought on many subjects.

With some of these specific protests I would gladly agree, yet there is perhaps another light in which we can see this "unyielding stability of opinion." Stability has its uses, as every considerate man knows, and it is not too far-fetched to think of the South as the fly-wheel of the American nation. A fly-wheel is defined by the science of mechanics as a large wheel, revolving at a uniform rate, the function of which is to stabilize the speed of the machine, slowing it down if it begins to go too fast and speeding it up if it begins to go too slow. This function it performs through the physical force of inertia. There are certain ways in which the South has acted as a fly-wheel in our society. It has slowed down social change when that started moving rapidly. And, though this will surprise many people, it has speeded up some changes when change was going slowly. Without judging the political wisdom of these matters, I merely point out that without Southern order, the New Deal probably would have foundered. Without Southern votes, the Conscription act would not have been renewed in 1941. Generally speaking the South has always been the free trade section. It is not very romantic or very flattering to be given credit only for inertia. But conservatism is not always a matter of just being behind. Sometimes conservatives are in the lead. I could give you more examples of that if I had time. It requires little gathering up of thread to show that a mind produced by this heritage is diametrically opposed to communism. With its individualism, its belief in personality, its dislike of centralized government, and its religiosity, the South sees in the communist philosophy a com-

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bination of all it detests. If that issue comes to a showdown, which I hope does not happen, there will never be any doubt as to where the South stands.

I suspect that a good many of you entertain thoughts of changing the South, of making it just like the rest of the country, of seeing it "wake up." It seems to me that the South has been just on the verge of "waking up" ever since I have been reading things about it. My advice is to be modest in your hopes. The South is one of those entities to which one can apply the French saying, "the more it changes the more it remains the same." Even where you think you are making some headway, you may be only heading into quicksand. It waits until you are far enough in and then sucks you under. It is well to remember that the South is very proud of its past, hard as it has been; it does not want to be made over in anybody else's image, and it has had a century of experience in fighting changes urged on it from the outside. I agree with W. J. Cash that the Southern mind is one of the most intransigent on earth; that is, one of the hardest minds to change. Ridiculing its beliefs has no more effect, as far as I have been able to observe, than ridiculing a person's religious beliefs — and the Southerner's beliefs have been a kind of secular religion with him: that only serves to convince him further that he is right and that you are damned.

INTRANSIGENCE IN ITSELF, however, is not good, of course. No mind ought to be impervious to suggestions and the influence of outside example. Intercommunication and cross fertilization are necessary. I covet a chance to talk someday to a Southern audience on what they need to learn from the North. But these express two-way relationships. It is a peculiar blindness to assume that the factors which have produced you are real, whereas the factors that have produced the other fellow are unreal. Those succeed best who go forward in the spirit of inquiry, seeking to understand the lines of force, and above all, realizing that there is something to be learned wherever complete lives are lived. With this kind of attitude it is possible for Virginia to learn from New England and New England from Virginia with a happy result that Parkman visualized but did not live to see.

2. THE HUMANITIES IN A CENTURY OF THE COMMON MAN

THE CURRENT DEFENSE of humanities does not take into account the depth of the tide running against them, probably because it is politically unsettling to do so. But if we wish to acquaint ourselves with prospects we shall soon be grappling with as pressing realities, we shall have to look more candidly at what is undermining this historic body of study. If certain forces continue unabated, humanistic training as we have known it is not likely to survive another generation.

The first point to take into account is the paradoxical fact that the humanities are a discipline. I say paradoxical because there is a certain anomoly in asking the human being to undergo a regimen in order to become more human, or more *humane*, if we may give a focused meaning to the latter word. For the humanities are not the spontaneous, loose, and thoughtless expression of the human race, but on the contrary a highly difficult, concentrated, and directed expression which aims at a

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center — man at his best, not man transmuted into an angel, which is the proper study of divinity, but man incarnate, which is today, man in this world, making the best of his estate as he responds to its colors and configurations. That is why we can today admire the humanism of Greece and Rome, with indifference to the other tendencies of this civilization. Like every humanism, theirs was an achievement in sensibility and expression, and their brilliance was such that the modern world has up until now been glad to emulate. But it has always been accepted as a starting point that this emulation required education and effort, so that he who engaged in it sought to make himself over in accordance with an ideal superior to his untutored self. That would seem to be the premise of all humanistic study: the best which has been thought and said in the world was not uttered in a babble, but came slowly and often at the cost of self-torture, or at least of the mortification of passing desire. Education in the humanities has always meant a study of the classics, and a classic is a sort of cultural leader, to whom we submit ourselves out of our faith in edification.

Those who have been brought up on a humanistic education assume that there is something in the monuments of humanism which compels a respect. I fear that they are only taking a constant of their own lives to be a universal constant, which does not exist. Once before a long night descended upon these monuments. They were there to plead their case, but you cannot plead to those who will not hear. I should like to echo Whitman here, and say that if to have great poets, there must be great audiences, to have a victorious humanism, there must be a humanized audience. Enough has been said elsewhere of the dehumanizing pressures under which we labor; and acute observers have long detected in modern men, and not solely among those who are low-placed, an impulse to reach for the metaphorical pistol when the word culture is mentioned. There seems to be growing up an attitude of truculence, and nothing is more fatal to an appreciation of past accomplishment. There are plenty of signs that the traditional respect for artistic and intellectual distinction is being displaced by reverence for political power and institutions. The first of these requires a belief in personality, and the second tends to require a disbelief in it. That may prove the fundamental difference between them.

It is a commonplace of recent history that about 1930 our age turned sharply political. The impulse has been so strong in the 30's and 40's as to carry along with it, like some engrossing wave, a large part of all artistic expression. Artistic work came to be judged by whether or not it contributed to a conception of progress, and the term progress implies, of course, a direction. If we had to give a name to that direction, we would not have to seek beyond "social democracy." This is a quite elastic term which covers, on the one extreme, the palest social amelioration, and on the other the strictest type of state-managed economy, requiring total regimentation. But whatever the form, social democracy exhibits two tendencies which are serious for the future of the humanities. One of these is a change in the structure of society, and the other a disposition of society's income.

The first tendency works to break down the categories which have hitherto existed in favor of an undifferentiated mass. Without raising the question of whether these classes which have been privileged in the past have deserved their fortune, it can be asked whether society is not thereby sacrificing its strength. It seems to be incontrovertible that all progress in the higher meaning of that term — the progress which is the carrying out of an enlightened moral ambition — has not come from society fused as a mass, but from society held in a kind of counterpoise. Aristotle has illustrated this truth through an analogy with music. A state ceases to be a state when what is harmony is allowed to pass into unison. Now the mass seems to be this state of unison, which is with out the principle of counterpoise. In the other type of society, which has proved creative, we have numberless arrangements in which men are functionally

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placed against men, since this is in very fact its integrating principle. There is a substratum of unity, of course, for without that even our definition would collapse. The principle of counterpoise works in such a way that one element plays its part and gets its living by being poised against another element. The one is commissioned to get as much as it can out of the other, more than would ever be granted without the pressure of its demand. The requirement is always made in the name of some higher order, or liberty, or degree of enlightenment. For example, in this functional counterpoise we have teachers against students, policemen against citizens, buyers against sellers, managers against employees. It is the pluralistic kind of arrangement, in which one group stands for and enforces an ideal of performance like a competitor in a contest, *viz.*, especially teachers and policemen, and the rest of us profit by their necessary though at times irksome office. The effect of this arrangement is to make society vertebrate, if we may vary the figure. I do not see what social democracy is going to substitute for this structure. What has been suggested or exhibited thus far is a more simple and more rigid pattern, which is without the flexibility of the healthy organic body. Now the humanities have in the past exerted their authority from a kind of limited autonomy; they have been one of the weights holding us in a counterpoise. In the new state, what is going to "enforce" the humanities? It is becoming clear that if the state does not do it, it will not be done; and yet if the state does it, it will likely be done in a way that will prove fatal.

This brings us to the second tendency, which is the economic transformation accompanying the process we have just sketched.

Everyday observation brings home to us that as the modern state expands its power, it becomes more jealous of the rights of individuals. It grows more rigorous in the exercise of the authority it owns; and secretly, one fears, it determines to extend its reach. It is inevitable that in this development it should become more curious about what individuals do with their incomes. Its level of understanding here is pretty low; expenditures for food, clothing, and shelter it can grasp, but as it seeks to placate the greatest number, things beyond these will be sold to it with increasing difficulty.

Let us consider for a moment the way in which it has brought the individual's economic life under surveillance. First, the state somewhat timidly lays an income tax, applied at the outset to the wealthy, who are few and conspicuous. Next, on a plea of emergency, or extended social welfare, it increases the rates sharply, making them virtually confiscatory on the upper levels. This fact is not presented in defense of an unregenerate capitalism; its relevance to the argument appears when one recalls what has happened in this country to private donations to universities. As someone has remarked, you cannot eat up your millionaires with taxes and have them too.

The state finally adopts the withholding tax, which has the practical effect of putting everyone on the government payroll, since the government first looks at the salary, decides what fraction of it the individual shall have, and then passes on the remainder. Thus the private company becomes in effect a kind of disbursing agent for the government. This circumstance, which seems to have gone largely unnoticed, is symbolic in the highest degree of the trend even in "free" countries toward state collectivism. The bearing upon the case of culture is just this: what is going to happen to the supernumerary, non-utilitarian part of our activity when every individual is virtually on a government expense account? The inescapable conclusion is that the sum which goes for "brave, translunary things" is going to be politically determined—and inspired.

The modern world is creating an ideology whose hero is the satisfied consumer. He is the common denominator, and the offices of the state are to serve him, and not some imponderable ideal. This state serves, moreover, with an ever-increased efficiency. Today, everything is under control; nothing slips through; there is less chance than ever

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before that the state will fail of its announced aim. Populations have been numbered, incomes have been listed; techniques have become machine-like. We must therefore consider the chance of the humanities in a social democracy whose policies will be efficient, as far as its light goes, but whose ideals encounter an insistent pull downward.

At this certain point objections arise. "Culture," which in common parlance stands for the humanities, is still a word with a great deal of prestige; it yet has associations of value which would induce politicians to sponsor it even if they felt no attachment to it. It is frequently seen that social democratic parties are more liberal than others in recognizing the claims of culture. They pledge large outlays for education and a better deal for the artists and intellectuals under their regime. The promise is fair, but it has to be distinguished from the performance for the plain reason that it is uttered as part of the ideal, and does not reflect the forces which will mold the actual. It is one thing to promise in the name of the people reverence for great art and intellectual distinction, but this is a situation in which the will, or it might be more accurately described, the impulse, of the people is going to determine. After all, one of the chief aims of social democracy is the removal of those barriers which in traditional or formalized societies stand between the people and an immediate fulfillment of their wishes.

What is likely to happen is this: in the primitive or heroic days of social democracy we would very likely get commissars or administrators who believe genuinely in the humanities and who would put up a battle for them. One is compelled to suppose that they would be battling as individuals, against indifference from above and poorly educated taste from below. For a time they might do much, but it would be foolish to mistake in this case accident for essence. For these men would be individualists, and sooner or later they would be supplanted by others closer to popular sympathy. It is likely that their very success would be held against them, so refined are the arts of political detraction. They would be described as aloof from the people, or as thwarters of the popular will; for, in fact, they would be representing an "undemocratic" force. Their successors would be the political type, who know all too well how to commit a murder while concealed under the cloak of popular sentiment. They will give the public what it wants and provide the rationalization. This is the fate in store for all state-controlled culture.

Anyone who thinks this is a fanciful alarm should reflect upon what has been done to public education in the United States. The boast of the innovating "progressive" schools is that they prepare the youth for a changing world. *Would it not be incomparably more sensible to prepare the youth to understand why the world is changing?* This is what the humanities do. There is little appeal here to the exponents of progressive education because they have no desire to rise above the confusion. If they did, they would soon be at odds with the weight and mass of general opinion. Consequently, in our present educational system, popular pressure and specious doctrines have almost extinguished the idea of discipline. Yet I am inclined to think that this system has been better protected than one could expect the humanities to be in a pure social democracy.[1]

There are further reasons for saying that we have reached a point at which these dangers are not purely speculative. We are able to examine three years of socialist rule in Britain, which indicates that we have not been expressing undue alarm. I shall cite two passages from a "Letter from England," by D. S. Savage, appearing in the Spring, 1946, issue of the *Hudson Review*. "A Labour government is in power and, so far from fostering the arts and subsidizing artists as some of its more gullible adherents

[1] Let us look at a special example which should serve to define the issue. Will anyone reasonably contend that the money which has been expended by the Rockefeller Foundation on education and research would have accomplished as much if it had passed through the hands of publicly elected officials? The fact that it was a privately managed corporation able to define what it wanted and above all, able to wait for long-term results, has made possible its great contribution.

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among the intelligentsia had hoped, it is proving on the whole inimical to cultural values; an implicit doctrine of 'bread alone'—that is, bread and guns — prevails." Mr. Savage ventures a prediction of his own. "It seems possible that as the social order hardens into shape we shall witness the emergence of two cultures — an official and an unofficial, the one well-paid, flashy, and sterile, drawing upon the talent of debauched artists and intellectuals, and the other surviving only through extreme enthusiasm and devotion."

It is an historic truth which holds good for the past several centuries of our life that culture has developed from the liberty of the superior individual to love superior things. Whether these individuals established foundations, or whether they merely sustained a market for works of distinction out of their earned or unearned surpluses, the result was as we have seen. The essential condition was that the individual had a power of decree. We have observed that the new social regime does not permit the individual much power of decree, and it is very jealous of these surpluses. Its present humor is to describe them as theft and to appropriate them on one pretext and another. We arrive then at a state in which the single, sensitive, imaginative person cannot project his will in this fashion. As Paul Valery has suggested, liberty in the modern "free" state is simply a liberty to be like the masses because political control is vested in them. They feel "free" because what they will is made law. The more one resembles the mass man, the freer he is because his impulses run the same channel as theirs. And if he is antipathetic to the idols of the mass, he may be very unfree, because mass law and mass ethos are enforced with peculiar rigor, and there is no court of appeal. Traditional forms of government now in disfavor provided a better haven for the individualist because they felt some distrust of their own power and often relaxed it in administration. It is the special mark of the mass that it has not such feeling about its power, and is exhilirated to see it brutally exercised. For its attitude toward the non-conventional, see our daily tabloids.

In summary, we face a future in which the mass is going to determine with increasing power what is done with the total productivity of the nation. There is little chance that it will devote a substantial part of that productivity to the development of pure science (unless science can be hitched to some wagon like preparation for defense in war), or to the creation of works of art which baffle or offend it.

It is now time to look at one or two aesthetic difficulties which will prove handicaps in an age dominated by this new mentality. I shall consider the first of these as the aesthetic plebeianism. There is an aesthetic of common life and an aesthetic of noble life, and the two are far from meeting. To find a principle that distinguishes them it is only necessary to point out that they correlate closely with optimism and pessimism. The noble view of life, which is the view that has conditioned art in the past, tends always to be pessimistic for the plain reason that life "does not measure up." It is not satisfactory when compared with that clear pattern which the believer in excellence has in his soul. This is clearly proved by the fact that the arts of tragedy and satire have flourished in ages which were predominantly aristocratic, that is to say, ages which accepted as a reality the distinction between good and bad men, or actions. It could not be otherwise, for satire is the reproof of man, and the very plot of tragedy depends upon the "good" man struggling in a net of evil. Whoever thinks he knows how the world ought to be feels a certain melancholy that it is not so. In all great art therefore there is a certain pessimistic overcast. Art is a kind of protest, a transfiguration. It has been remarked that if one looks below the surface of two of the most dazzling periods of creativeness in history, the Greek and the Elizabethan, he finds a well of melancholy. Shakespeare's plays deepened in gravity as the man matured.

But what occurs when life is made not the subject of a critique, but an occasion for relaxed joyousness and animal abandon? There have been signs

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for years that we are passing out of one climate of belief into another. A significant witness is that tragedy has all but disappeared. And if this is but a beginning, it may be no exaggeration to say that the new climate is to be anti-artistic and anti-cultural. We may be faced with a time when the root-idea of standards, which is the anchor of all humanistic discipline, is to be eradicated. Indeed, our expression here may be too cautious, for the extent to which knowledge has been displaced by opinion makes this almost now an actuality.

The aristocratic view of life is waning because the mass everlastingly insists that the world be represented as *pleasant*. One quality which the crowd is never able to acquire is a hardheadedness sufficient to accept the realism of the world. For this reason it falsifies whatever it touches, and there is no hope for true art where the principle at work is falsification. To foretell the kind of art expression which the mass is going to demand, and demand effectively by reason of its economic power, one has only to look at today's media of mass circulation. The preferred themes are romantic love (this seems to be a modern version of the Aphrodite Pandemos, which is distinct from the Aphrodite Ouranios of the ancients, and from the courtly love of the mediaevals), success stories, fantasies, comedy with elements of violence and sadism. I suspect that the truest index to this mentality is the comic strip, whose offenses against taste and aestheic theory it would be impossible to number. But present in all of them is the unrelenting demand that the world be subjectivized to accord with our humor. The herd man never grows reconciled to the fact that life is a defeat, and that this defeat is its real story. He wants instead a pleasing fiction by which his hopes are ingeniously flattered. It is not pressing the matter too far to say that what he wants is *deception*.

What we are actually contending with in these aesthetic plebeianisms is the mass' deep-seated and enduring hostility to the idea of discipline. It does finally require some discipline of mind to accept the fact that life is not a triumphal progress, but a sadly mixed affair with many a disenchantment. When Arnold talked of seeing things steadily and seeing them whole, he must have had reference to just this evasiveness and flabbiness of mind which it is the function of culture to remove—where it can. It will never do that where the ideal is the thing made easy.

The psychological springs of this hostility are not far to seek. The mass can never grant that there is something superior to its *habitus* and its way of conduct. For as soon as it grants the existence of such, it is under a theoretic discipline. The mass is a jealous sovereign. Those who challenge it from a superior level it seeks to destroy with the *ad hominem* attack. It is daily verifiable that in a culture so maintained, the best rewarded of those who work in the arts are soothers and entertainers.

A secondary problem posed by the aesthetic plebeianism is the impossibility of maintaining a meaningful criticism. Obviously this aesthetic can never circumvent the criterion of popularity. It finds itself always in the tautologous position of saying that because a thing is popular, it is good; and because it is good, it is popular.

Art criticism is here in the same dilemma as political democracy when the latter sets up the voice of the people as the voice of God. Either it must accept its own proposition and say that the people is infallible, and can never for one minute, or in one action, go wrong; or else it must yield its whole position. If one admits that the people can even for a minute be deluded; that is to say, that one man or one minority can be right for a minute and the people wrong, then he admits the existence of a right that is not determined by the people. I feel this to be so important that I shall try to put it in another way. The moment one grants that the people can sometimes err, even temporarily, even when bamboozled by demagogues or the press, he has scuttled the thesis of the popular determination of truth. For he has already admitted that the people may be one thing and the truth another, and this could never be if pop-

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ular opinion were the sole determinant of what is true.

Now when we apply this finding to the humanities in a mass society, the same interesting thing is revealed. Either popular impression is infallible, and the people are the only judge of what they should have, or else one must admit the existence of an independently grounded aesthetic. As soon as the latter is admitted, however, the beautiful and the non-beautiful become constants, and there is something superior to the popular taste, which may be applied to it. But I fear the mass is too intractable an animal to grant these existences after it has sensed the way they are tending.

Put into language, its denial seems to take this form: it does not matter if we disdain the moral earnestness of Christianity; it does not matter if we refuse to think with the clarity of the Greeks; it does not matter that we cannot dramatize with the success of the Elizabethans; it does not matter if we fall below the eighteenth century in elegance of manner. It does not matter? I suppose one can argue here only by begging the question and saying that it is blasphemy not to prefer the good and obey its commandments. And possibly it is as much as we can do about the condition of modern man to say that he is blasphemous. In the past he has blasphemed idols that were set up for him; and now he blasphemes those which he set up for himself when he repudiates the humanities.

The second difficulty may be, at some deeper level, the source of the first. As a teacher of humanities, I have grown disturbed over an attitude which is appearing in students, including those with some endowment of sensibility. I could describe it briefly by calling it a distrust of all rhetoric. The great passages of the past, the flights of Milton, of Burke, of Arnold, are lost upon them; and they show an active distrust of contemporary matter which is rhetorically presented. The power of language to stir, or to direct the feelings of man, seems only to provoke them to an antagonism. This has gone so far that the once-familiar rhetoric of pulpit and platform is beginning to seem an anachronism. Two different interpretations can be put upon this development.

The first is that the new generation has become scientific-minded and is insisting upon pure notation in all discourse. That is to say, it has accepted the advice of the semanticists and has resolved to have no traffic with words whose objective reference is dubious. They are impatient of anything which lacks the objective correlative, and so when language passes from a sort of literal correspondence with what is signified, to metaphor, as all rhetoric must, they simply cease to accept. Since they cultivate the scientist's detached outlook upon the world, emotion is for them mere disturbance in what ought to be clear communication. Pure notation will give them knowledge in the same way that mathematics does, or nearly so. And as for making up their minds about how to feel about a thing, well, that can wait—perhaps upon the development of yet another science.

The second interpretation, which I believe to be the true one, is that our generation is losing faith in the value of value. It will appear on a moment's reflection that this is the same as losing faith itself. Ours is not so much a generation of vipers as a faithless generation. Since the whole of humanistic study is based upon the acceptance of value, here is where the decay has its source. People have suffered much in the past decades, and they have not often been told the truth by their political leaders. It may be that there has set in as a defense a kind of psychic numbness. Since all feeling brings imposition in its train, there is a will not to feel. (I have noted among more than one student a kind of shrinking from propaganda as though it were a dreaded plague loose in the world—which in a way it may be.) Now we approach the ultimate in disenchantment.

Here would be cause for rejoicing if it were possible for man to live in a devalued world, but man is simply not that kind of animal. He has got to show his inclinations. And with the death of value there is every possibility that he will do it in grotesque, unintelligible ways, in fetishism and explosions of hard feel-

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ing, in demonism and vandalism. There is not the slightest possibility that he is less a creature of feeling than before. But the old gods have gone and the new gods have not arrived. It may be that in the interim he will turn into an idol smasher. The humanities seem high on the list of the things he will rudely reject, or allow to drift into obscurity. I fear that this is the meaning of the hatred of the old spacious rhetoric, with its tendency to elevate all that is described.

Most surveys of the plight of the humanities I have seen fall into wishful conclusions.

One supposition is that the colleges will be able to save them by a reform of curriculum. In response to this we see the inauguration of courses in general education. But this seems to be in essence only a streamlining. The courses are recast, made more compact and better integrated. The new conception, however, is hardly a discipline in the humanities such as used to season the graduates of our universities. It may easily degenerate into another requirement like the ubiquitous English composition. The intention is good, of course, but the hope is not great. There was a time when a cultural education was income-producing for the legions that take it, and that means inevitably a different kind of education. Statistics on what the returned veterans have studied in our universities will prove the point.

Or it is supposed that larger grants to this and that will restore the balance. These will be gratefully received, and they will help, but it is sanguine to suppose that they will restore the balance in a displacement so huge as the one taking place before our eyes. I have already shown that public sources of such grants have a very limited independence and could not long survive political attack. A grant to the humanities today is like a contribution to a church whose doctrines we have no thought of honoring with practice. I doubt that anything large and vigorous can be sustained on this.

Teachers of the humanities are going the way of teachers of Latin and Greek and elocution unless we have something like a Second Coming of faith in the values.

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Reflections on the Loss of Liberty

GEORGE J. STIGLER

THE CONSERVATIVES have been in high alarm at the encroachments on liberty by the state for at least 30 years. It would be possible to amass a volume of ominous predictions on the disappearance of individual freedom and responsibility, and not by silly people.

Yet if we canvass the population we shall find few people who feel that their range of actions is seriously curtailed by the state. This is no proof that the liberties of the individual are unimpaired. The most exploited of individuals probably does not feel the least bit exploited. The Negro lawyer who is refused admission to a select club feels outraged, whereas his grandfather was probably a complaisant slave. But neither is complacency a proof of growing tyranny.

So let us look at what liberties, if any, the typical American has lost in the recent decades of growing political control over our lives. Let us face this American as he completes his education and enters the labor force. Of what has he been deprived?

Some additional barriers have been put in the way of entrance into various occupations. Some barriers consist of the direct prescription of types of training; for example, to teach in a public school one must take certain pedagogical courses. More often, the state imposes tests — as for doctors and lawyers and barbers and taxi drivers — which in turn require certain types of training in order to be passed.

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But few people consider such restrictions on occupations to be invasions of personal liberty. The restrictions may be unwise — those for school teachers are generally so viewed by the university world — but since the motive is the protection of users of the service, and since the requirements are directed to competence even when they are inefficient or inappropriate, no question of liberty seems involved. No one, we will be told, has a right to practice barbering or medicine without obtaining the proper training. The freedom of men to choose among occupations is a freedom contingent on the willingness and ability to acquire the necessary competence. The mentally and physically untalented man has no inherent right to pilot a commercial plane, or any other type.

For consider: we surely do not say that a man born with weak or clumsy legs has been denied the portion of his liberty consisting of athletic occupations. At most a man is entitled to try to enter those callings which he can discharge at a level of skill which the community establishes.

"Which the community establishes." The obverse of the choice of occupations is the choice of consumers. It can be said that the denial of my right to patronize lawyers or doctors with less preparation than the majority of my fellow citizens deem appropriate is the complementary invasion of my liberty. Why should the community establish the lowest levels of skill and training with which I satisfy my needs?

The answer is, of course, that on average, or at least in an appreciable fraction of cases, I am deemed incompetent to perform this task of setting standards

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of competence. I am, it is said, incapable of distinguishing a good surgeon from a butcher, a good lawyer from a fraud, a competent plumber from a bumbler, and so on.

Now one could quarrel with both sides of this position: neither has my own incompetence been well demonstrated (especially when account is taken of my ability to buy gurantees of competence) nor has anyone established the ability of other judges to avoid mistakes or at least crudity of judgment. But these are questions of efficiency much more than of justice, so I put them aside not as unimportant but as temporarily irrelevant.

The real point is that the community at large does not think a man should have the right to make large mistakes as a consumer. The man who cannot buy drugs without a prescription does not really rebel at this undubitably expensive requirement. The man who is denied the services of a cheaper and less well trained doctor or teacher does not feel that he has been seriously imposed upon.

THE CALL TO the ramparts of freedom is an unmeaning slogan in this area. If we were to press our typical American of age 22, he would tell us that some infringements on his liberties would be intolerable, but they would be political and social rather than economic: free speech should not be threatened — at least by McCarthy — and Negroes should not be discriminated against. No economic regulation of consumers would elicit serious objection, and this younger person would often be prepared to go even farther in regulating consumers in areas such as health and education. We would have to propose policies remote from current discussion, such as compulsory location of families to hasten racial integration, before we should encounter serious resistance to public controls in principle.

Governmental expenditures have replaced private expenditures to a substantial degree, and this shift poses a related problem to liberty. The problem seems less pressing because private expenditures have increased in absolute amount even though public spending has risen in this century from perhaps 5 to 25 per cent of income. Yet the shift has been real: we can no longer determine, as individuals, the research activities or dormitory construction of universities, the housing of cities, the operation of employment exchanges, the amount of wheat or tobacco grown, or a hundred other economic activities. But again the typical American finds each of these activities worth while — meaning that he thinks that the activity will not be supported on an adequate scale by private persons.

ON A CLOSER VIEW OF THINGS, some restrictions on individuals as workers will strike most Americans as unfair, especially if they are presented as indictments. Complaints will be aroused by a demonstration that political favorites have been enriched by governmental decisions which excluded honest competitors — and of course this can be demonstrated from time to time, or perhaps more often. The complaint, however, will involve equity much more than liberty.

This conclusion, that Americans do not think that the state presently or in the near future will impair the liberties that a man has a right to posses is, of course, inevitable. It is merely another way of saying that our franchise is broad, our representatives will not pass laws to which most of us are opposed, or refuse to pass laws which most of us want. We have the political system we want.

The conservative, or traditional liberal, or libertarian, or whatever we may call him, will surely concede this proposition in the large. He will say that this is precisely the problem of our times: to educate the typical American to the dangers of gradual loss of liberty. One would think that if liberty is so important that a statue is erected to her, the demonstration that a moderate decline of personal freedom leads with high probability to tyranny would be available in paperback at every drugstore. It is not so easy to find. In fact, it may not exist.

That there have been many tyrannies no one will dispute, and indeed it is at

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least as easy to find them in the twentieth century as in any other. Moreover, the loss of vital liberties does not take place in a single step, so one can truly say that a tyranny is entered by degrees. But one can easily reverse this truism and assert that some decrease in liberties will always lead to more, until basic liberties are lost. Alcoholics presumably increase their drinking gradually, but it is not true that everyone who drinks becomes an alcoholic.

THE NEAREST APPROACH to a demonstration that the tendency of state controls to increase beyond the limits consistent with liberty is found in Hayek's *Road to Serfdom*. But Hayek makes no attempt to prove that such a tendency exists, although there are allegations to this effect.[1] This profound study has two very different purposes:

(1) A demonstration that *comprehensive* political control of economic life will reduce personal liberty (political and intellectual as well as economic) to a pathetic minimum.

I may observe, in passing, that this argument seems to me irresistible and I know of no serious attempt to refute it. It will be accepted by almost everyone who realizes the import of *comprehensive controls.*[2]

(2) If the expansion of control of economic life which has been underway in Britain, the United States, and other democratic western countries should continue long enough and far enough, the totalitarian system of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy will eventually be reached.

This second theme is not an historical proposition — and no historical evidence was given: it is the analytical proposition that totalitarian systems are an extreme form of, not a different type from, the democratic "welfare" states to whom the book was addressed. Hayek was telling gentlemen drinkers, and especially some Englishmen — who were becoming heavy drinkers, not to become alcoholics.

The twenty-five years that have passed since the outbreak of World War II have seen further expansions of political control over economic life in the United States, and in most western European nations except Germany. Yet no serious diminution of liberties deemed important by the mass of educated (or uneducated) opinion has taken place. Another hundred years of governmental expansion at the pace of these recent decades would surely destroy our basic liberties, but what evidence is there that such an expansion will continue? Quite clearly, no such evidence has been assembled.

IT IS ONE THING to deny that evidence exists for the persistence of present trends to where they will endanger our liberties, and quite another to deny that such a momentum exists. Or, differently put, where is the evidence that we *won't* carry these political controls over economic life to a liberty-destroying stage?

1 For example:

"Although competition can bear some admixture of regulation, it cannot be combined with planning to any extent we like without ceasing to operate as an effective guide to production. Nor is 'planning' a medicine which, taken in small doses, can produce the effects for which one might hope from its thoroughgoing application. Both competition and central direction become poor and inefficient tools if they are incomplete; they are alternative principles used to solve the same problem, and a mixture of the two means that neither will really work and that the result will be worse than if either system had been consistently relied upon. Or, to express it differently, planning and competition can be combined only by planning for competition but not by planning against competition." (p. 42)

And again:

"Yet agreement that planning is necessary, together with the inability of democratic assemblies to produce a plan, will evoke strong demands that the government or some single individual should be given powers to act on their own responsibility. The belief is becoming more and more widespread that, if things are to get done, the responsible authorities must be freed from the fetters of democratic procedure." (p. 67)

Such passages are, however, warnings of the consequences of comprehensive socialization rather than arguments that it is inevitable.

2 For a recent restatement of this view by a person not identified with "conservative" views, see the essay by K. E. Boulding, "The Dimensions of Economic Freedom," in E. O. Edwards ed., *The Nation's Economic Objectives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964) esp. pp. 119-20

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This may be an impeccable debating point, but it will carry much less conviction than an empirical demonstration of the difficulty of stopping a trend. When men have projected the tendency of a society to a distant terminus, they have invariably committed two errors. The tendency develops in a larger number of directions than the prophet has discerned: no tendency is as single-minded as its observer believes. And the tendency encounters other and contradictory forces in the society, which eventually give the course of events a wholly different turn. We have no reason to believe that the current prophets are any wiser.

SO I CONCLUDE: we should either fish or cut bait. On the subject of liberty the conservative should either become silent, or find something useful to say. I think there is something useful to say, and here is what it is.

The proof that there are dangers to the liberty and dignity of the individual in the present institutions must be that such liberties have already been impaired. If it can be shown that in important areas of economic life substantial and unnecessary invasions of personal freedom are already operative, the case for caution and restraint in invoking new political controls will acquire content and conviction. We cannot scare modern man with incantations, but we can frighten him with evidence.

The evidence, I think, will take a variety of forms:

1. A full study of the barriers of men to entry in occupations, and of the extent to which the barriers can be defended on social grounds, will demonstrate, I believe, that the area of occupational freedom has been seriously restricted simply for reasons of ignorance, or special interest. If this is correct — if the present practices will not bear close review — the danger of further extensions of such barriers will be substantially reduced.

2. The widespread belief in the incompetence of the individual and the efficacy of economic censorship of tastes is the second large area of potential invasion of personal freedom. This development has surely not benefited from close study: it has happened that errors of judgment or deficiencies of knowledge of a tiny fraction of consumers have led to restraints being imposed on all consumers, without even checking what gains are achieved by the censorship. My own study of the S.E.C., indeed, reveals a clear instance of where the gains are not worth the cost. If consumers are wiser than the public believes, and if political intervention is not infallible and economical, we shall be better able to stop future invasions of the consumer's freedom.

I do not know whether justice is more or less important than liberty, or whether they are even fully separable. The standards of justice under political direction of economic life, I conjecture, are deplorably low:

3. The state is now the giver of many valuable rights. The favorites get TV channels, or oil import quotas, or F.D.I.C. charters, or leases on federal grazing lands, or N. Y. state liquor store licenses, or waivers from the local zoining board. Who has studied the bases on which these favors are allotted? I suspect that a careful study would display vast caprice, much venality, and a considerable number of calluses on applicants' knees and navels. The harshness of competition may mellow somewhat in public repute when alternative systems of distributive justice are studied.

Studies of the types here proposed will, I am reasonably confident, give vitality and content and direction to fears for liberty in our society. But whether the studies confirm the need for reform and vigilance in preserving freedom, or suggest that such fears are premature, they are essential to remove this subject from the category of cliché. It is no service to liberty, or to conservatism, to continue to preach the imminent or eventual disappearance of freedom; let's learn what we're talking about.

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The Fusionists on Liberalism and Tradition

RALPH RAICO

THE PUBLICATION OF a symposium on the question, "What is conservatism?"[1] provides us with an opportunity to explore once again a complex of issues frequently raised in these pages—that having to do with the differences between libertarianism and conservatism. In this article, I shall not attempt to deal with all of the areas covered by these differences, nor with the essays of all twelve contributors to Meyer's symposium. Instead, I shall deal merely with certain aspects of the attempted reconciliation of the two philosophies that goes by the name of "fusionism."

Frank S. Meyer and M. Stanton Evans are the two most notable exponents of the fusionist position, and they present their case in two essays in the present volume.[2] The problem they are trying to solve may be stated in this way: the term "conservative" when applied to various writers in America today (especially when applied by social democratic writers, who usually have little familiarity with the literature) appears, on closer examination, to be equivocal. The authors of the following two statements, for example, although they are both sometimes considered "conservatives," clearly have widely divergent approaches to so basic a question as the nature of government:

> In mankind's experience, government has always figured as an institution publicly representing shared insights into the meaning of life, God, man, nature, time.[3]

> Society cannot exist if the majority is not ready to hinder, by the application or threat of violent action, minorities from destroying the social order. This power is vested in the state or government. . . . Government is in the last resort the employment of armed men, of policemen, gendarmes, soldiers, prison guards, and hangmen. The essential feature of government is the enforcement of its decrees by beating, killing, and imprisonment.[4]

There are, in fact, as Meyer and Evans point out, two distinct groups of writers which the term "conservative" in its current sense encompasses: those whose intellectual forebears are to be found chiefly in the ranks of the classical liberals of the 18th and 19th centuries (this group would include Hayek, Friedman,

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[1] Frank S. Meyer, ed., *What is Conservatism?* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964). 242 pp. $4.95.

[2] Meyer, "Freedom, Tradition, Conservatism"; Evans, "A Conservative Case for Freedom."

[3] Gerhard Niemeyer, "Risk or Betrayal? The Crossroads of Western Policy," *Modern Age*, Spring, 1960, p. 124. The context makes it clear that Prof. Niemeyer regrets the passing of this conception of government.

[4] Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action* (New Haven: Yale University, 1949), pp. 149, 715.

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von Mises, etc.), and those who trace their ideas back primarily to Burke and the 19th century conservatives (Kirk is the best-known representative of this group, which also includes others associated with *National Review* and *Modern Age*). The first group is called by Meyer the "libertarians," and the second the "traditionalists." Often libertarians and traditionalists attack one another vigorously, and some in each camp have even maintained that the two view-points are fundamentally at absolute odds. It is true that members of the two factions very often have had similar opinions on questions of immediate political importance (which is one of the chief reasons why they are looked on as factions of one movement), but anyone who has read the works of the two groups is aware that there exist significant differences on a more basic level. These have to do with such matters as the weight given to tradition, the arguments used for freedom, the priority allowed freedom as against other values (order, virtue, and so on), as well as with (as the quotations from Niemeyer and von Mises show) what I am afraid we may have to call the "philosophical presuppositions" of the two view-points. The imposing task the fusionists have undertaken, then, is to resolve the differences between libertarians and traditionalists—and this by showing that both have something of fundamental value to contribute to a common "conservatism" (for that is to be the name of the amalgamated movement), and that both are likewise at fault in certain respects.

WHAT THE LIBERTARIAN (or classical liberal) has to offer, the fusionists maintain, is a good understanding of the meaning of freedom, of the dangers facing it, and especially of the connection between economic and other forms of freedom. He is mistaken, however, in disregarding "value" and the moral law, and in having no understanding of the goal and *raison d'être* of freedom, which is "virtue." The traditionalist, on the other hand, is the complimentary figure to the libertarian, and brings to the synthesis a—as the phrase goes—deep commitment to moral value, to virtue and so on. Moreover, he understands the part that tradition must play in the life of society, while the libertarian typically "rejects tradition." Thus, the stage is set for the synthesis, which will consist in a political philosophy developed on the basis of "reason operating within tradition," and upholding freedom as the highest secular end of man and virtue as the highest end of man *tout court*.

It will be seen that anything approaching an exhaustive critique of this thesis would be impossible here.[5] What I shall attempt to do, therefore, is simply to clear some ground by examining certain points in the fusionist thesis, with the aim of helping to provide the basis for a more analytical and less rhetorical discussion of these issues than has sometimes been the case in the past.

Before one can determine to what extent, if any, classical liberalism[6] must be modified, it is absolutely crucial, of course, for one to have a correct conception of what classical liberalism means. It appears to me, however, that in this regard, conservative and fusionist writers, while quite dogmatic, are also quite mistaken. As a rule, they are in the habit of treating liberalism in a casual, off-handed way, scarcely ever bringing forward any actual evidence to substantiate their rather free-swinging claims. At the risk of seeming unfair to M. Stanton Evans — which is certainly not my intention — I shall submit *his* conception of classical liberalism, which appears to me fairly typical of this view, to an extended analysis.

Evans states:

> The libertarian, or classical liberal, characteristically denies the existence of a God-centered moral order,[7]

[5] For a broader discussion of the fusionist position, see the forthcoming article by Ronald Hamowy in *Modern Age:* "Classical Liberalism and Neo-Conservatism: Is a Synthesis Possible?"

[6] In what follows, I shall be using the terms "classical liberalism," "liberalism," and "libertarianism" interchangeably.

[7] In a footnote to his essay (p. 232), Evans asserts that he is using "libertarian" to mean "the chemically pure form of classical liberalism," including the "acceptance of [an] anti-religious philosophy." Presumably he has abandoned this

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> to which man should subordinate his will and reason. Alleging human freedom as the single moral imperative, he otherwise is a thoroughgoing relativist, pragmatist, and materialist. [p. 69]

In this amazing statement, Evans asserts the following concerning the "typical" classical liberal or libertarian:

(1) he denies the existence of a God-centered moral order;[8]
(2) he alleges human freedom to be the single moral imperative;
(3) aside from (2), he is a complete relativist, pragmatist, and materialist.

Let us deal with these allegations in detail.

(1) This is false, of course, in regard to the many liberals who were Christians (*e.g.*, Ricardo, Cobden, Bright, Bastiat, Madame de Stael, Acton, Macaulay, etc.).[9] Indeed, many classical liberals (including present-day ones) have felt that the connection between their political and their religious and ethical views has been a very intimate one. Frédéric Bastiat, for instance, who, because of his "superficiality" and "glib optimism" is sometimes taken to be the very paradigm example of a classical liberal, expressed himself as follows towards the end of one of his more important works:

> There is a leading idea which runs through the whole of this work, which pervades and animates every page and every line of it; and that idea is embodied in the opening words of the Christian Creed — I BELIEVE IN GOD.[10]

John Bright was the man who, with Cobden, and for twenty years after Cobden's death, was the leader of the Manchester School in British politics and political and economic thought — surely a typical liberal, if there is such a thing. Yet the following characterization of Bright, by his most authoritative biographer, hardly seems compatible with Evan's description:

> Religious feeling, in its simplest form, was the very basis of his life. He was always a Friend [*i.e.*, Quaker] before everything else; and a servant of God; a man of deep, though ever more silent devotion.[11]

Although Christians were probably, and theists certainly, in the majority, it is true that a certain number of liberals *were* atheists or (much more frequently) agnostics: J. S. Mill, Herbert Spencer, John Morley, etc. Nevertheless, the following points ought to be made: (a) the denial of a "God-centered moral order" has been no more characteristic of classical liberalism than its affirmation; (b) even if a majority of liberals had been atheists and agnostics, the connection is so far accidental and historically-conditioned, and not logical; (c) supposing the majority of liberals to have been tainted with unbelief in one form or another, Evans still presents no reasons

terminology in the passage quoted here. For if he has not, then the assertion of the anti-religiousness of the libertarian would be merely an uninteresting tautology, entailed by Evans' personal terminology, and, moreover, the passage would then have to read: "The libertarian, or classical liberal, *necessarily* denies . . ."

[8] It is difficult to see why Evans modifies the term "God-centered moral order" with the clause, "to which man should subordinate his will and reason." Presumably, the assertion of the existence of *any* moral order entails that one should subordinate one's will to it. As for the subordination of reason to this order, I take this to imply that God's moral order is not knowable by reason alone. Why such a view, even supposing that the typical libertarian maintained it, should be thought to be associated with freethinking and atheism, it is impossible to say. For it appears to be precisely the position of the Catholic Church: "Whilst therefore *the Catholic believes that the moral law is knowable to man by sheer reason and experience*, being the law of man's very nature, he believes that the fulfilment or non-fulfilment of it has more than natural implications." Thomas Corbishley, S. J., *Roman Catholicism* (London: Hutchin's University Library, 1950), p. 57 (ital. added). Since I cannot see that this clause could lead to anything but a confusion of the issue, I feel justified in ignoring it.

[9] While it is logically possible for one to be a Christian and at the same time to have some other "center" than God for one's moral system, still the rule has been that those professing Christianity have attributed to God the central role in their ethical systems. I am therefore taking the Christian faith of a classical liberal as *prima facie* disproof of Evans' assertion.

[10] *Harmonies of Political Economy* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1870), Part II, p. 150. Emphasis in text.

[11] G. M. Trevelyan, *The Life of John Bright* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1914), p. 104.

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for dismissing the liberalism of Christian writers like Bastiat.

(2) The second charge — that the classical liberal or libertarian alleges "human freedom as the single moral imperative" — can hardly be seriously meant. Does Evans mean to say that liberals characteristically do not believe benevolence, or even lack of malice, to be morally enjoined on men? This cannot have been true of the many Christian liberals, and neither was it the case with the non-Christians, *least of all the Benthamite utilitarians* among them. Evans mentions only two names in connection with his general description: J. S. Mill and Herbert Spencer. Spencer explicitly states that, in addition to justice (respect for the rights of others), the moral code enjoins both "negative" and "positive" beneficence, the latter being the capacity to receive happiness from the happiness of others.[12] This may not be an especially elevated view of our moral obligations, but it is nonetheless sufficient to contradict Evans' statement, at least in regard to one of the only two writers he mentions by name. But the statement is even more erroneous in regard to the utilitarian liberals. J. S. Mill makes their position clear in his well-known essay, "Utilitarianism":

> I must again repeat what the assailants of utilitarianism seldom have the justice to acknowledge, that the happiness which forms the utilitarian standard of what is right in conduct, is not the agent's own happiness, but that of all concerned. As between his own happiness and that of others, utilitarianism requires him to be as strictly impartial as a disinterested and benevolent spectator. In the golden rule of Jesus of Nazareth, we read the complete spirit of the ethics of utility. To do as you would be done by, and to love your neighbor as yourself, constitute the ideal perfection of utilitarian morality.[13]

Far from being "characteristic" of classical liberalism, (2) is an attribute for which I doubt that a *single* example could be found in the whole history of liberalism.

(3) EVANS GIVES US virtually no idea of what he might mean by these three highly-charged terms, "materialist," "relativist," and "pragmatist," so we will have to deal with them as best we may.

"Materialist" may have a precise philosophical, or a loose vulgar, meaning. Taken in the first sense, the assertion would be absurd: if *any* metaphysic were characteristic of liberalism, it would probably be idealism in one form or another, not materialism. Taken in the vulgar sense of addiction to, or espousal of, "material" (usually sensual) pleasures, the assertion is also invalid. It is, indeed, hardly worth rebutting, since to support this allegation, Evans only adduces a statement by — Ernest Renan. We might as well point out, however, that, even ignoring the fact that "materialist" is scarcely a fair description of Bentham's form of hedonism, and certainly not of J. S. Mill's, the German liberals of the Classical period—*e.g.*, von Humboldt and Kant — and the French liberals of the Restoration—*e.g.*, Constant and Madame de Stael—assuredly had ideas on ethics and the destiny of man independent of any form of the pleasure philosophy.

In Evans' view, the liberals were also typically "pragmatists." Whether this is supposed to mean that they were followers of Peirce and William James, or, in some looser sense, that they believed that the truth was "what works," is unclear. It would be tedious to attempt to salvage this claim by lending it some semi-reasonable meaning, and then showing that even then it had no foundation in fact. The rebuttal of the assertion, therefore, will wait upon its being given some sense.

Evans also claims under (3) that the liberals, aside from their adherence to freedom, have been complete "moral relativists."[14] This brings up an issue

[12] *Social Statics* (New York: Appleton, 1880), pp. 83-84.

[13] *Utilitarianism, On Liberty and Representative Government* (New York: Dutton, 1950), p. 16.

[14] At times Evans implies that, not only are libertarians moral relativists, but that, in consequence of this, *they do not even hold that any-*

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which is frequently raised by conservatives: often, the essence of the "moral crisis of our age" is seen in the decline of faith in "absolute values." It should be clear that the question of moral relativism *vs.* moral absolutism cannot even be intelligently approached until we know what is to be understood by these terms, but conservatives, in discussing the subject, generally fail to indicate their meaning. In general philosophical discussion, the most important senses of the term "moral relativism" appear to be: (a) the idea that moral rules are defeasible, *i.e.,* are not unconditionally valid; and, more frequently, (b) the idea that "it is logically possible for two persons to accept verbally conflicting ethical statements without at least one of them being mistaken.[15]

(a) The idea that moral rules must be absolute in the sense that they are binding under all empirically possible conditions appears to be a sense in which conservatives often use the term. And yet it seems to me hardly a defensible position. Is it, after all, possible to cite a single moral injunction with content (not, *e.g.,* "It is good to do the Will of God") and with application to social questions (not, *e.g.,* "It is good to love God") which is unconditionally valid? Would it, for instance, be impermissable under *all* possible conditions to take the life of a man whom one knows to be innocent? It seems to me that circumstances could well be imagined in which this would be the reasonable — possibly even the moral — thing to do. Whether or not supported by classical liberals, moral absolutism in this sense appears to me to be an untenable position, the rejection of which cannot rightfully be made the grounds for censuring anyone.

(b) The more common sense of "moral relativism" is the position that it is possible for what appear to be contradictory ethical statements to be true at the same time. A relativist in this sense might hold, for instance, that ethical statements are simply reports of the speaker's subjective feelings, and, therefore, the statement, "Murder is evil," may be true or false, depending on the actual feelings of the person who uttered it. Another form of this second sense would be that of a relativist who might hold that it is impossible to make ethical judgments transcending the bounds of different societies, and that an ethical statement may be "true" in one society and "false" in another. In this sense of relativism, however, the utilitarians (to take the group Evans probably has chiefly in mind) were almost paradigm *absolutists.* The reason for this is obvious. For any given situation in which an ethical judgment is to be made, the facts are what they are: one decision will maximize happiness, while a different one will not maximize it.[16] Thus, although we may be mistaken in our decision, still, in principle, there is only one true judgment in each ethical situation.

Thus, of the two most important senses of "moral absolutism," one is a sense in which, whatever the liberals may have thought, it cannot reasonably be defended; the other is a sense for which many adherents of moral absolutism can be found among the classical liberals.

I HAVE SPENT a good deal of time—and probably the reader's patience as well—in discussing these two sentences. But my justification lies primarily in the circumstance that these statements well summarize the inaccurate conception — "impression" would perhaps be a better word — of classical liberalism which many conservatives hold and propagate. It may well be that classical liberalism is superficial, unrealistic and obsolete; apparently modern-day conservatives are eager to join most of the rest of the 20th century in announcing so. But before we can accept this evaluation — and

thing is immoral! E.g., (addressing the libertarians): "If there were no objective standards of right and wrong, why object to tyranny? If murder and theft are *not* immoral, why object to them either singly or in the mass?" (p. 72; ital. in text). We will, however, deal only with the first claim.

[15] Richard B. Brandt, *Ethical Theory* (Engelwood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice Hall, 1959), pp. 271, 154.

[16] I am ignoring those very few cases in which the net utility of two different courses of action will be exactly the same.

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with it the idea that liberalism must at least be substantially modified—we must be satisfied, as so far we cannot be, that it is really classical liberalism which has been demolished, and not a strawman.

NOW I WANT TO turn my attention to one of the chief problems which Meyer's and Evans' fusionism must attempt to solve: that of *tradition.* The role of tradition is often seen as the crux of the division between the two wings of what is allegedly basically one movement; the traditionalists, not unnaturally, emphasize tradition, while the libertarians are said to reject it. But just what is at issue here would be much clearer if, instead of scornful references to the French Revolution and the "apotheosis of reason," conservative and fusionist writers had outlined, in a more or less systematic way, what they have in mind when they speak of "tradition," and what they claim for it and why. Nowhere is lack of precision in this whole area more regrettable than in the repeated assertion that the classical liberals "reject tradition." The rejection of tradition can mean many different sorts of things, and depending on what is meant, it may be a good or a bad thing.

If it means, for example, that the traditionality of an idea is not to be taken by the political philosopher as an argument for its truth, then the rejection of tradition, as far as I can see, is totally unobjectionable. For to defend the truth of an assertion on the basis that it has been the traditional belief of our society, presupposes that any belief that has been traditionally accepted by our society is very likely to be a true one. But contrary examples are available in too great an abundance to permit of any confidence in such a premise. Thus, recourse to tradition in abstract, speculative argument is invalid.

On the other hand, when we say that a person accepts tradition, we might mean that he believes that tradition ought to play a large part, not in the *evaluation of putative truths,* but in *the functioning of society,* which is obviously a different thing. Here a person might argue along these lines: science is one thing, and life another. A systematic Cartesian doubt may be useful in the scientific enterprise, but, applied to social life, it would make mankind like "the flies of summer." It is necessary for the continuance of society, it could be argued, that a good deal of our moral code, for instance, be taken simply on faith, at least by the great majority of people, and probably by everyone. It would be intolerable to have the existence of organized society depend on each individual arriving at the indispensible moral rules through his own reasoning. Thus, there must be some means of attaching people to these rules. One of the most powerful of these means, the argument might continue, is tradition. People who could not follow the abstract arguments for the moral code nevertheless obey it, because of the affection and regard surrounding *mores* which have been adhered to for a very long time. Now, this is a plausible argument, and may well be substantially correct. The important thing to realize, however, is that it involves something completely different from maintaining the truth of a given assertion on the basis of its traditionality.

Now, the second category may be further subdivided: there are traditions that are maintained in the *social* sector (typically the sector of free interaction among individuals) and there are traditions pertaining to the *government* sector (typically the sector of force or the threat of force). An example of traditionality in the social sector would be the continuance of Christianity in its received forms as the result of the private decisions, habits, etc., of people; an example in the realm of governmental activity is (or was, 200 years ago) the continuance of the persecution of Protestant "heretics" in France, Spain, etc.—that is, a tradition involving violent interference with the peaceful actions of individuals. Now a classical liberal may be an atheist, or he may be a Christian, or he may hold some other position on this question. If he is an atheist, it is likely that he will personally disapprove of the continuance of Christianity as the freely-accepted religion of individuals; his

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private opinion is likely to be that people would be more happier, more rational, or whatever, if they abandoned Christianity. If the classical liberal is a Christian, then presumably he will be pleased to see the continuance of the tradition of Christian belief. Thus, on this question concerning a tradition in the *social* sector, liberals may have various personal views of their own, but liberalism itself has no policy recommendations to make whatsoever; does not, in fact, concern itself with the matter. How does it stand with the second sort of traditional arrangement, that pertaining to the government sector?

Here, before we can answer this question, we are compelled to make yet another distinction (and, as regards the libertarian-conservative controversy, possibly the most important one to be made): there are some traditional governmental arrangements which involve interference with the basic rights of the individual — the persecution of Protestants in France under the Old Régime, for example. Others, however, pertain to the structure of the government itself, and may not, in the first instance, have anything to do with individual rights at all, as, for example, a traditional adherence to bicameralism. In the case of the first sort of traditional governmental arrangement, the classical liberal characteristically and by the logic of his principles recommends the abolition of the tradition, *i.e.*, recommends that the government cease doing certain things. With regard to *this* category, then, the liberal may be said to "reject tradition"— that is, he holds that the traditionality of the arrangement can be no argument in its favor. It must be tested against certain standards, and, if it is found wanting, steps must be taken towards its elimination.

The case is different with the second sort of traditional governmental arrangement: that pertaining to the structure of government itself, as, for example, the extent and conditions of the franchise, and the form of the government (constitutional monarchy, republic, etc.). Such issues do not involve basic individual rights, in the sense that religious freedom and freedom from involuntary servitude are basic. Their function, from the liberal point of view, is to aid the preservation of the basic rights, and they may therefore vary to a great extent, depending on time and place. As Edouard Laboulaye, probably the outstanding French liberal of the later 19th century, put it:

> Whatever may be the epoch or the country, whatever the form of government or the degree of civilization, every man has the need to exercise his physical and spiritual faculties, to think and to act. Russian or Englishman, Frenchman or Turk, every man is born to dispose of his person, his actions and his goods. . . . With political liberties it is not the same; they change according to the time and country. One does not always have need of the same guarantees [of liberty]; as the form of attack varies, so does that of the defense.[17]

TO SUMMARIZE OUR rather rough classification of the senses of tradition (which is offered, with some trepidation, as a tentative basis for discussion):

I. tradition in scientific and philosophical discourse: the traditional acceptance of a truth claim may be adduced as evidence in support of the claim;

II. tradition in the functioning of society: the traditionality of a societal arrangement may be adduced as good reason for continuing the arrangement. This may apply either to:

   A. the social (non-governmental) sector, *i.e.*, to traditions not involving government action, or to

   B. the governmental sector. Under B we have

      I. political traditions violating basic individual rights, and,
      II. political traditions (primarily those having to do with the structure of government itself) which do not violate basic individual rights.

[17] Edouard Laboulaye, *Le Parti Libéral: son Programme et son Avenir* (Paris, 1871), pp. 121-22.

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In considering the differences between libertarianism and fusionism (as well as conservation), I would locate the significant and challenging disagreement regarding tradition primarily under II A. That is, while classical liberalism as a rule restricts itself to attempting to secure individual rights by operating on the government sector (and in this endeavor may well make use of traditional political elements), fusionist and conservative writers claim that certain traditions within the social sector must often be regarded as necessary conditions for the preservation of liberty and ought to be actively cultivated and promoted by all supporters of a free society. This is especially true, in their view, of religion. The idea is suggested at times by Meyer and Evans, and is put succinctly by Stephen Tonsor, in his interesting essay, "The Conservative Search for Identity," in the present volume:

> Religion is important to the democratic state not only because it preserves the fabric of society but also because it acts as the most important power to check the aggressive, centralizing, and totalitarian tendencies of the modern state. without a strong religion, which remains outside and independent of the power of the state, civil liberty is unthinkable. The power of the state is, in part, balanced and neutralized by the power of the church. The freedom of the individual is most certain in that realm which neither church nor state can successfully occupy and dominate. [p. 150]

This represents, of course, a historical and sociological hypothesis concerning an alleged casual connection between religion and freedom. If true, it could indicate that certain policy recommendations might be in order which libertarianism would tend to frown on (Tonsor himself maintains that tax money ought to be used to support church schools). In any case, it is a thesis which ought, I think, to be elaborated and critically and dispassionately examined, for it appears to me to be the most interesting and the most plasible of the fusionist claims.

This is only one of a number of important issues raised by fusionism which it is impossible to go into here. The claim that libertarians believe in the "innate goodness of man," and err in ignoring the reality of "original sin" (whatever might be meant by these two notions) is also one that should sometime be submitted to critical examination, if only because it is so often advanced. More important would probably be a discussion of the principle aim of fusionism: in place of our support of a free society for all our various ends (or simply for itself), to substitute support of it because it is a means to one particular end, namely "virtue," in whatever sense Meyer and Evans attach to the term.

Finally, it should be evident that none of what has been said here is to be taken as indicating hostility or rancor towards the authors whose writings have been discussed. In contrast to a number of conservatives, Meyer's and Evans' real concern for freedom is obvious. And that their intentions are good ones is evidenced by the statement of Meyer:

> . . . the development of a common conservative doctrine, comprehending both emphases [traditionalist and libertarian]—cannot be achieved in a surface manner by *blinking differences or blurring intellectual distinctions with grandiose phraseology.* [p. 18, ital. added]

Certainly a true and important judgment. It is unfortunate that, in the heat of battle it is too often forgotten.

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H. L. Mencken and The American Hydra

WILLIAM H. NOLTE

H. L. MENCKEN'S major complaint with the nation at large may be reduced to one often repeated lament: America is without an intellectual aristocracy that would give it direction and order. This absence of an intellectual class free to inquire and interpret, to act on its own prerogatives, to function autonomously without regard for the opinions of the mass also explains, in large part anyway, Mencken's disapproval of democracy. Like many another artist—Melville comes at once to mind — Mencken was unable to reconcile democracy with order. And it was order that prevented man from running amuck in chaos. Moreover, it was order, or form, that gave universality to art. The modern democratic state resembles nothing more than the drunken beggar on horseback, riding off in all directions. Though it is impossible, and not even wholly desirable, to prevent that beggar from doing as he jolly well wishes, Mencken did attempt rather successfully to slow him down and make him sit up in the saddle as if he were sober. This service was performed by attacking one of the most virulent outgrowths of democracy: Puritanism. (I should explain that I use the word *democracy* — which by now is perhaps without any specific meaning — as the antonym of *aristocracy*.)

Mencken performed, broadly speaking, two major services for the national letters: he led the attack on Puritanism, which had crippled the artist in America for generations; and he gave great aid to a large number of the best writers America has produced.

Down to the 1920's in America, the "master" of the arts had things pretty much his way. He was powerful, he was confident, he was popular. He was the proud descendant of Puritanism in its narrowest sense. He still violently objected to anything that smacked of heresy; especially did he object to the modern-day Maypole dancers. He represented the "moral viewpoint," the "closed vision," the "narrow outlook"—call it what you will. This ogre haunting the dreams of honest writers had over the years taken many shapes in the daylight world of actuality. In the first two decades of this century, the Puritanical restrictions were upheld in art by a class of men — the academicians; and by a philosophy — the so-called New Humanism. Moreover, the stronghold of Puritanism in the social realm had moved from New England to the South. Mencken's criticism of the professor, of the New Humanist, and of the South is of one cloth.

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THE FOUNDING FATHERS of New England came to America to establish one particular type of freedom—the freedom to enforce their own narrow beliefs without any deviations.[1] Indeed, one of the first things the college student learns in a course on early American literature or history is that the concept of the Pilgrims which he acquired from high school must be radically revised. It is really an example of *un*learning, which is the most powerful of all antidotes to the conditioned mental reflex, to superstition, and to prejudice. In Europe the Puritans had been persecuted largely because they were public nuisances, malcontents unable or unwilling to live and let live, similar in many ways to the God-crazy Anabaptists who were wont to run through the streets naked and howling to the invisible powers and principalities of the air. Only in a land uninhabited by civilized man could the Puritan hope to set up his peculiar kingdom of God. In America he had to contend only with the Indian, who was an easy prey for the sharp-trading, vindictive Puritan. In his book article for December, 1921, of the *Smart Set*, Mencken took to task those historians who credited the Puritans with the invention of most of the liberal institutions and ideas, such as they were, in America. (Mencken, incidentally, was in the forefront of those who, in the 1920's, called for new and realistic appraisals of the American past.) "There is not a single right," Mencken wrote, "of the citizen of today, from free speech to equal suffrage and from religious freedom to trial by jury, that [the Puritans] did not oppose with all their ferocious might." Actually, as Mencken pointed out then, and as we now know for certain, it was the non-Puritan immigrants to New England who were responsible for overthrowing the Puritan and setting up free institutions in the country.

> To [the anti-Puritans] we owe everything of worth that has ever come out of New England. They converted the sour gathering of hell-crazy deacons into the town-meeting; they converted the old pens for torturing little children into public-schools; they set up free speech, free assemblage, a free press, trial by jury, equality before the law, religious freedom, and manhood suffrage; they separated church and state; they broke down the old theology and substituted the rationalism that was to come to flower in New England's Golden Age. The Puritans were absolutely against all of these things. They no more gave them to the Republic than they gave it Franklin or Emerson. What they gave it was something quite different: the shivering dread of the free individual that is still the curse of American civilization. They gave it canned patriotism, comstockery, intolerance of political heresy, Prohibition. They gave it Wilsonism, Burlesonism, and the Ku Klux Klan.[2]

THE MAIN IDEAS of Mencken on Puritanism may be found in "Puritanism as a Literary Force," one of the major documents of American criticism. Aside from its value as a penetrating analysis of the debilitating effects of Puritanism on art, "Puritanism as a Literary Force" served as a spark to ignite the most bitterly waged critical war of the century. At the time of its publication (in *A Book of Prefaces*, 1917; the other three essays in the volume are on Conrad, Dreiser and Huneker) Mencken was at the height of his powers as a literary critic. He was 37 years old and not yet disenchanted with the profession of book criticism (it should always be remembered that Mencken's best literary criticism was done *before* the twenties, the decade over which he reigned as America's leading man-of-letters). Moreover, *A Book of Prefaces* was his first important volume of criticism (not counting the book on Nietzsche, which was primarily exposition). And it stands today, along with various essays in the *Prejudices* volumes as the best writing he was ever to do in that particular area. Indeed, within ten years after it appeared, Mencken had given up criticism of *belles lettres* except for occasional pieces and comments that continued to see print until his death in 1956.

[1] See the excellent preface to *The Puritans* (New York: Harper & Sons, 1938), edited by Perry Miller and Thomas H. Johnson.

[2] H. L. M., "Variations upon a Familiar Theme," *The Smart Set*, Dec., 1921, p. 139.

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Inevitably, the reigning America-First critics fell on *A Book of Prefaces* like angels on the Antichrist. Never before in America had a writer directed such a blast against an American sacred cow. And to publish such an un-American essay just when the nation was making the world safe for democracy was more than any right-thinking man could stand. The reception of *Prefaces*—which had a small sale in 1917, but enjoyed a wide audience when reissued in 1924—is a good gauge of Mencken's popularity. Only a few rebels could stomach him during the war (Sgt. Edmund Wilson, for example, read and re-read the book, which convinced him more than any other single work that literary criticism was a worth-while profession); after the return of the conquering armies, a whole generation accepted the Menckenian theses as gospel.

In the opening pages of "Puritanism as a Literary Force," Mencken made it clear that Puritanism as a theological doctrine was pretty much exploded: "That primitive demonology still survives in the barbaric doctrines of the Methodists and Baptists, particularly in the South; but it has been ameliorated, even there, by a growing sense of the divine grace, and so the old God of Plymouth Rock, as practically conceived, is now scarcely worse than the average jail warden or Italian padrone."[3] But as an ethical concept, Puritanism lived on in all its fury. To Mencken, the American still described all value judgments, even those of aesthetics, in terms of right and wrong. It was only natural that such "moral obsession" should strongly color our literature. In the histories of all other nations there have been periods of what Mencken called "moral innocence — periods in which a naif *joie de vivre* has broken through all concepts of duty and responsibility, and the wonder and glory of the universe have been hymned with unashamed zest." But in America no such breathing spells have lightened the almost intolerable burdens of man. For proof of this continued moralism, one need only to glance at the critical articles in the newspapers and literary weeklies—that is, at those of the period before and during World War I. "A novel or a play is judged among us, not by its dignity or conception, its artistic honesty, its perfection of workmanship, but almost entirely by its orthodoxy of doctrine, its platitudinousness, its usefulness as a moral tract. A digest of the reviews of a book of Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* would make astounding reading for a Continental European."[4] Had not most of the critics of Dreiser's *The Titan* indignantly denounced the morals of Frank Cowperwood, the novel's central character?

> That [Cowperwood] was superbly imagined and magnificently depicted, that he stood out from the book in all the flashing vigour of life, that his creation was an artistic achievement of a very high and difficult order—these facts seem to have made no impression upon the reviewers whatever. They were Puritans writing for Puritans, and all they could see in Cowperwood was an anti-Puritan, and in his creator another. It will remain for Europeans, I daresay, to discover the true stature of *The Titan*, as it remained for Europeans to discover the true stature of *Sister Carrie*.[5]

When one encounters an American humorist of high rank, Mencken said, he finds further evidence of the Puritan mind. Aside from Ambrose Bierce, actually a "wit" and not at all well known, there had been few scurvy fellows of the Fielding-Sterne-Smollett variety. Mencken believed that our great humorists "have had to take protective colouration, whether willingly or unwillingly, from the prevailing ethical foliage, and so one finds them levelling their darts, not at the stupidities of the Puritan majority, but at the evidences of lessening stupidity in the anti-Puritan minority." Rather than do battle against, they have done battle for, Philistinism—and Philistinism is just another name for Puritanism. Mencken might easily have found an exception to his generalization here in the person of George Ade, whose "fables" could hardly be said to support Philistinism. But then Ade was

[3] H. L. M., *A Book of Prefaces* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1917), pp. 197-198.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 200.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 201.

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a singular case; besides, he did not offer much as a witness for the prosecution—and Mencken was intent on prosecuting. Mencken saw his favorite American artist, Mark Twain, as a perfect example of the American whose nationality hung about his neck like a millstone.

> One ploughs through *The Innocents Abroad* and through parts of *A Tramp Abroad* with incredulous amazement. Is such coarse and ignorant clowning to be accepted as humour, as great humour, as the best humour that the most humourous of peoples has produced? Is it really the mark of a smart fellow to lift a peasant's cackle over *Lohengrin?* Is Titian's chromo of Moses in the bullrushes seriously to be regarded as the noblest picture in Europe? Is there nothing in Latin Christianity, after all, save petty grafting, monastic scandals and the worship of the knuckles and shin-bones of dubious saints? May not a civilized man, disbelieving in it, still find himself profoundly moved by its dazzling history, the lingering remnants of its old magnificence, the charm of its gorgeous and melancholy loveliness? In the presence of all beauty of man's creation—in brief, of what we roughly call art, whatever its form—the voice of Mark Twain was the voice of the Philistine.[6]

In tracing the development of Puritanism in America, Mencken found two main streams of influence. First, there was the force from without, that is, the influence of the original Puritans, who brought to the New World a philosophy of the utmost clarity, positiveness and inclusiveness. Actually, Mencken had no great objections to the original Puritans' philosophy, or at least so he says in a letter to Gamaliel Bradford, dated October 24, 1924; what he objected to was that philosophy's "perversion, by Methodists, Rotarians and other such vermin."[7] Although the original Puritan often possessed a good education (he was not infrequently a Cambridge or Oxford graduate) and even "a certain austere culture," he was almost sure to be hostile to beauty in all its forms. Nature, it must be remembered, fell with Adam, and like Adam is at the mercy of wanton demons. To copy nature is to copy corruption. There is little, if any, of the dionysian spirit, the *Ja-sager* philosophy, in the preachments of Puritan divines.

The eighteenth century saw the passing of the Puritans as a powerful body of law makers. Deism undermined the old theology; epistemological studies replaced metaphysics. The proper study of mankind was thought to be man. Skepticism was all but universal among the learned of Europe, and Americans still imported their ideas wholesale from the mother countries. Both political and theological ideas were imported from France, where Voltaire, Diderot, D'Alembert and the other Encyclopedists were giving an entirely new direction to world philosophy. Mencken noted that even in New England, the last stronghold of the old Puritanism, this European influence was felt: "there was a gradual letting down of Calvinism to the softness of Unitarianism, and that change was presently to flower in the vague temporizing of Transcendentalism." This decline of Puritanism proper was not, however, an unalloyed blessing. For as Puritanism "declined in virulence and took deceptive new forms, there was a compensating growth of its brother, Philistinism, and by the first quarter of the nineteenth century, the distrust of beauty, and of the joy that is its object, was as firmly established throughout the land as it had ever been in New England." With the passing of the Adamses and the Jeffersons, Mencken remarked, the nation was quickly turned over to the tradesmen and the peasants. There was, he maintained, but one major difference between American peasants and those of other nations: the American peasant was listened to; he possessed power. (There is, of course no such thing as a peasant in America today—only social unfortunates.) With the election of Andrew Jackson, a man with whom Mencken violently disagreed and yet admired as a strong individual, Philistinism became the national philosophy. Jackson did what had not been done before: "he carried the mob's distrust of good taste even into the field of conduct; he was the first to put the rewards of conformity above the dictates of common decency; he founded

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[6] *Ibid.*, pp. 203-204.

[7] Guy J. Forgue, ed., *Letters of H. L. Mencken* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1961), p. 271.

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a whole hierarchy of Philistine messiahs, the roaring of which still belabours the ear." The chief concern of Americans ever since the official triumph of mobocracy has been politics; what's more, politics tended to absorb the rancorous certainty of the fading religious ideas; the game of politics had turned itself into a holy war.

> The custom of connecting purely political doctrines with pietistic concepts of an inflammable nature, then firmly set up by skillful persuaders of the mob, has never quite died out in the United States. There has not been a presidential contest since Jackson's day without its Armageddons, its marching of Christian soldiers, its crosses of gold, its crowns of thorns. The most successful American politicians, beginning with anti-slavery agitators, have been those most adept at twisting the ancient gauds and shibboleths of Puritanism to partisan uses. Every campaign that we have seen for eighty years has been, on each side, a pursuit of bugaboos, a denunciation of heresies, a snouting up of immoralities.[8]

THE PERVASIVENESS of Puritan ethics (not, remember, theology) in America placed all purely aesthetic concerns in limbo. Mencken stated that with the exception of Whitman there was hardly a major writer who used the materials of his own age for subject matter. He used Algernon Tassin's *The Magazine in America* (1916) to support his thesis that the literature of the ante-bellum period was almost completely divorced from life as men were then living it. Only in such "crude politico-puritan tracts" as *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was there any attempt made to interpret, or even to represent, the culture of the time. (The fact that Mrs. Stowe was chastised in her own day for her "realistic" novels only supports Mencken's contention.) Later, the culture found historians, and in at least one work—*Huckleberry Finn*—it was depicted with the highest art, but Twain's *magnum opus* was a rare exception. The nineteenth-century novelists did not even sentimentalize the here and now in the manner of Mencken's contemporaries. The best minds of that period were engaged either in business or politics. The few competent men of the period who were artists almost without exception forsook the present for the non-political, non-social realms of Arcadia or El Dorado. It is evident that much of the material in "Puritanism as a Literary Force" was condensed in the later essay on" The National Letters" (in *Prejudices: Second Series*, 1920). For example:

> Fenimore Cooper filled his romances, not with the people about him, but with the Indians beyond the sky-line, and made them half-fabulous to boot. Irving told fairy tales about the forgotten Knickerbockers; Hawthorne turned backward to the Puritans of Plymouth Rock; Longfellow to the Acadians and the prehistoric Indians; Emerson took flight from earth altogether; even Poe sought refuge in a land of fantasy. It was only the frank second-raters—*e.g.*, Whittier and Lowell—who ventured to turn to the life around them, and the banality of the result is a sufficient indication of the crudeness of the current taste, and the mean position assigned to the art of letters. This was pre-eminently the era of the moral tale, the Sunday-school book.[9]

IN THE SEVENTIES and eighties, with the appearance of such men as Henry James, Howells, and Twain (Mencken also listed Bret Harte even though he never considered him a good second-rate artist), a better day seemed to be dawning. These writers gave promise of turning away from the past to the teeming and colorful life that lay about

[8] *A Book of Prefaces*, pp. 212-213. It should be unnecessary to remind the reader that today many high government officials are waging, by their own frequent admissions, a "moral" war against the infidelity of Communism. Of course, the Communists are themselves fully aware of the effectiveness of moral judgments against the enemy. In his long introduction to *Patriotic Gore*, Edmund Wilson composed a devastating indictment of all those who employ morality as a justification of or cloak for acts which are clearly motivated by self-interest. Although he does not exempt other nations from this disease, Wilson concentrated on the American's extraordinary ability in this particular form of causistry.

[9] *A Book of Prefaces*, pp. 214-215.

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them. The promise, however, was not fulfilled.

> Mark Twain, after *The Gilded Age,* slipped back into romanticism tempered by Philistinism, and was presently in the era before the Civil War, and finally in the Middle Ages, and even beyond. Harte, a brilliant technician, had displayed his whole stock when he had displayed his technique: his stories were not even superficially true to the life they presumed to depict; one searched them in vain for an interpretation of it; they were simply idle tales. As for Howells and James, both quickly showed timorousness and reticence which are the distinguishing marks of the Puritan even in his most intellectual incarnations. The American scene that they depicted with such meticulous care was chiefly peopled with marionettes.[10]

To return to "Puritanism as a Literary Force." The force from within was, in essence, a force of "conditioning." The American tended to view all the workings of God, fate, man and nature as exemplifications of a moral order or structure or pattern, just as his forebears had done. The rebel, that is, the writer who made an earnest attempt to depict his surroundings realistically rather than romantically or sentimentally, had had little influence on the main stream of American literature. Such writers as Hamlin Garland began as realists but soon saw a rosy light and devoted themselves to safer enterprises; Garland ended his days by composing books on spiritualism, or, as Mencken put it, by "chasing spooks." (Garland, as well as Howells, refused to sign the Dreiser Protest, a petition objecting to the ban placed on *The "Genius."* In the early days of the twentieth century, there had been a few realists—for example, Ambrose Bierce, Frank Norris, Stephen Crane, David Graham Phillips, Henry Fuller, Upton Sinclair—but their rebellion was apparently ineffectual.

> The normal, the typical American book of today is as fully a remouthing of old husks as the normal book of Griswold's day. The whole atmosphere of our literature, in William James' phrase, is "mawkish and dishwatery." Books are still judged among us, not by their form and organization as works of art, their accuracy and vividness as representations of life, their validity and perspicacity as interpretations of it, but by their conformity to the national prejudices, their accordance with set standards of niceness and propriety. The thing irrevocably demanded is a "sane" book; the ideal is a "clean," an "inspiring," a "glad" book.[11]

In addition to the impulse from within, or the internal resistance, there was a pervasive Puritan influence from without. No examination of the history and present condition of American letters, Mencken believed, could have any value at all unless it took into account the influence and operation of this external Puritan force. Supported by the almost incredibly large body of American laws, this power resided in the inherited traits of Puritanism, which were evident in the "conviction of the pervasiveness of sin, of the supreme importance of moral correctness, of the need of savage and inquisitorial laws." The history of the nation, Mencken wrote, might be outlined by the awakenings and re-awakenings of moral earnestness. The spiritual eagerness that was the basis for the original Puritan's moral obsession had not always retained its white heat, but the fires of moral endeavor had never gone out in America. Mencken remarked that the theocracy of the New England colonies had scarcely been replaced by the libertarianism of a godless Crown when there came the Great Awakening of 1734, "with its orgies of homiletics and its restoration of talmudism to the first place among polite sciences." The book-bumping of Jonathan Edwards' "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" stands as a testament to that holy resurrection of Almighty Sin.

During the Revolution, politics superceded theology as the national pastime, and there was a brief period of relative quiet. But no sooner had the Republic emerged from the throes of adolescence than "a missionary army took to the field again, and before long the Asbury revival was paling that of Whitefield,

[10] *Ibid.,* pp. 217-218.

[11] *A Book of Prefaces,* pp. 224-225.

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Wesley and Jonathan Edwards, not only in its hortatory violence but also in the length of its lists of slain." From Bishop Asbury down to the present day, that is, to World War I, the country was rocked periodically by furious attacks on the devil. On the one hand, the holy *Putsch*

> took a purely theological form with a hundred new and fantastic creeds as its fruits; on the other hand, it crystallized into the hysterical temperance movement of the 30's and 40's, which penetrated to the very floor of Congress and put "dry" laws upon the statute-books of ten States; and on the third hand, as it were, it established a prudery in speech and thought from which we are yet but half delivered. Such ancient and innocent words as "bitch" and "bastard" disappeared from the American language; Bartlett tells us, indeed, in his "Dictionary of Americanisms," that even "bull" was softened to "male cow." This was the Golden Age of euphemism, as it was of euphuism; the worst inventions of the English mid-Victorians were adopted and improved. The word "woman" became a term of opprobrium, verging close upon downright libel; legs became the inimitable "limbs"; the stomach began to run from the "bosom" to the pelvic arch; pantaloons faded into "unmentionables"; the newspapers spun their parts of speech into such gossamer webs as "a statutory offense," "a house of questionable repute" and "an interesting condition." And meanwhile the Good Templars and Sons of Temperance swarmed in the land like a plague of celestial locusts. There was not a hamlet without its uniformed phalanx, its affecting exhibit of reformed drunkards.[12]

Mencken argued that the Civil War itself was primarily a result of the agitations of anti-slavery preachers. He admitted that to many historians the anti-slavery feeling had economic origins, but he insisted, probably correctly, that the war was largely the result of ecstatically moral pleas. In "The Calamity at Appomattox" (in the *American Mercury* for September, 1930), Mencken attributed the Negro's bondage in the South today to the fact that the war was won by the North. Before the surrender at Appomattox, there was little hatred of the Negro in the South. More importantly, the Negro would most certainly have been made a freedman before the end of the nineteenth century anyway, and without the resulting hostility between the races. The Union victory, as Mencken stated, simply deprived the best southerners of any say in national and regional affairs, and placed the lower orders—the scalawags, carpet-baggers, freed slaves, and poor white trash—in the saddle. The Negro, of course, was soon disfranchised again, but the power remained in the hands of incompetent whites.

The Puritan of the days between the Revolution and the Civil War was, according to Mencken, different from the *Un*-Puritan and neo-Puritan of the post-bellum period. The distinguishing mark of the Puritanism of this middle period, at least after it had attained to the stature of a national philosophy, was its appeal to the individual conscience, its exclusive concern with the elect, its strong flavor of self-accusing. Certainly the Abolitionists were less concerned with punishing slave-owners than they were with ridding themselves of "their sneaking sense of responsibility, the fear that they themselves were flouting the fire by letting slavery go on." The Abolitionist was willing, in most cases, to compensate the slave-owner for his property. The difference between the new Puritanism with its astoundingly ferocious and uncompromising vice crusading and the Puritanism of the 1840's was of great degree, if not of kind: "In brief, a difference between *re*nunciation and *de*nunciation, asceticism and Mohammedanism, the hair shirt and the flaming sword." After going through a number of stages and fads, neo-Puritanism found its apex in comstockery. And in comstockery there was a frank harking back to the primitive spirit.

> The original Puritan of the bleak New England coast was not content to flay his own wayward carcass: full satisfaction did not sit upon him until he had jailed a Quaker. That is to say, the sinner who excited his highest zeal and passion was not so much himself as his neighbor; to borrow a term from psychopatholo-

[12] *Ibid*, pp. 227-229.

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gy, he was less the masochist than the sadist. And it is that very peculiarity which sets off his descendant of today from the ameliorated Puritan of the era between the Revolution and the Civil War. The new Puritanism is not ascetic, but militant. Its aim is not to lift up saints but to knock down sinners. Its supreme manifestation is the vice crusade, an armed pursuit of helpless outcasts by the whole military and naval forces of the Republic. Its supreme hero is Comstock Himself, with his pious boast that the sinners he jailed during his astounding career, if gathered into one penitential party, would have filled a train of sixty-one coaches, allowing sixty to the coach.[13]

In accounting for the wholesale ethical transvaluation that came after the Civil War, Mencken pointed to the Golden Calf; in short, Puritanism became bellicose and tyrannical when it became rich. History shows that a wealthy people are never prone to soul-searching. The solvent citizen is less likely to find fault with himself than with those about him; what's more, he has more time and energy to devote to the enterprise of examining the happy rascal across the street. The Puritan of America was, generally speaking, spiritually humble down to the Civil War because he was poor; he subscribed to a *Sklavenmoral.* But after the Civil War prosperity replaced poverty; and from prosperity came a new morality, to wit, the *Herrenmoral.* Great fortunes were made during the conflict, and even greater wealth followed during the years of the robber barons. Nor was this new prosperity limited to a few capitalists only; the common laborer and the farmer were better off than ever before.

The first effect of prosperity was, as always, a universal cockiness, a delight in all things American, the giddy feeling that success has no limits. "The American became a sort of braggart playboy of the western world, enormously sure of himself and ludicrously contemptuous of all other men." Mencken observed that religion, which is always dependent upon its popularity for survival, naturally began to lose its inward direction and take on the qualities of a business enterprise. The revivals of the 1870's were similar to those of a half century before except that the converts at the later date were more interested in serving than in repenting. The American Puritan was less interested in saving his own soul than in passing salvation on to others, especially to those reluctant individuals who hung back and resisted the power of divine grace. It became apparent to the more forward-looking ecclesiastics that the rescue of the unsaved could be converted into a big business. All that was needed was organization. Out of this unabashed industrialization of religion came a new force, one that still exerts great influence on American society. "Piety was cunningly disguised as basketball, billiards and squash; the sinner was lured to grace with Turkish baths, lectures on foreign travel, and free instructions in stenography, rhetoric and double-entry bookkeeping." Religion lost its old contemplative nature and became an enterprise for the public relations man, the bookkeeper and the extrovert. In short, religion was "modernized." What was true at the time Mencken wrote this essay is, as a pragmatist would say, even more true in the 1960's.

After giving the necessary background material, Mencken then devoted a lengthy section of his essay to the workings and accomplishments of Anthony Comstock and his associates. The various laws, state and national, which Comstock got passed offer the contemporary reader a sorry spectacle of the vice crusader's power. As a public figure, Old Anthony was as well known as P. T. Barnum or John L. Sullivan. He had disciples in every large city who were just as eager for blood as he was. Since there were few American writers brash enough to challenge the inquisitors, Comstock and company were forced to turn to foreign works. Rabelais and the *Decameron* were naturally banned (they are still being banned in various American cities today); Zola, Balzac and Daudet were driven under the counters; Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* and Harold Frederic's *The Damnation of Theron Ware* were also among the victims.

[13] ***Ibid.*, pp. 231-232.**

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These are but leading examples of the purge. In fact, Comstock got 2,682 convictions out of 3,646 prosecutions and is credited by his official biographer with having destroyed 50 tons of books, 28,682 pounds of stereotype plates, 16,900 photographic negatives, and 3,984,063 photographs. That such a Herod's record could have been compiled was largely a result of the postal laws, which, of course, Comstock was responsible for in the first place. The very vagueness of the law was of great convenience to the prosecutors. That a novel like George du Maurier's *Trilby*, which I read in search of damning evidence, could have been widely condemned as "lewd," "obscene," and "lascivious" is next to incredible. It merely provides further proof that Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* is a good deal closer to reality than it is to fantasy.

> It is held in the leading cases that anything is obscene which may excite "impure thoughts" in "the minds . . . of persons that are susceptible to impure thoughts,"[14] or which "tends to deprave the minds" of any who, because they are "young and inexperienced," are "open to such influences"[15] — in brief, that anything is obscene that is not fit to be handed to a child just learning to read, or that may imaginably stimulate to lubricity of the most foul-minded. It is held further that words that are perfectly innocent in themselves —"words, abstractly considered, [that] may be free from vulgarism"—may yet be assumed, by a friendly jury, to be likely to "arouse a libidinous passion . . . in the mind of a modest woman." (I quote exactly! The court failed to define "modest woman.")[16] Yet further, it is held that any book is obscene "which is unbecoming, immodest. . . ."[17] Obviously, this last decision throws open the door to endless imbecilities, for its definition merely begs the question, and so makes a reasonable solution ten times harder. It is in such mazes that the Comstocks safely lurk. Almost any printed allusion to sex may be argued against as unbecoming in a moral republic, and once it is unbecoming it is also obscene.[18]

Mencken then cited numerous cases to show that the defendant was helpless in proving his innocence against any of a whole host of charges of immorality. Besides, Dr. Johnson was obviously right when he stated that no man would want to go on trial, even if possessed of absolute proof of his innocence. Obviously, neither author nor publisher ever knew what might pass the watchful eyes of the self-appointed smut-hounds and defenders of decency. Competent work invariably was banned while the frankly prurient and vulgar went unmolested. Mencken was never in favor of denying anything or anyone the freedom of speech, but he was indignantly amazed that the serious work of an Auguste Forel or a Havelock Ellis should be barred from the mails while the countless volumes of "sex hygiene" by filthy-minded clergymen and "smutty old maids" were circulated by the million and without challenge.

> Frank Harris is deprived of a publisher for his *Oscar Wilde: His Life and Confession"* by threats of immediate prosecution; the newspapers meanwhile dedicate thousands of columns to the filthy amusements of Harry Thaw. George Moore's *Memoirs of My Dead Life* are bowdlerized, James Lane Allen's *A Summer in Arcady* is barred from the libraries, and a book by D. H. Lawrence is forbidden publication altogether; at the same time half a dozen cheap magazines devoted to sensational sex stories attain to hundreds of thousands of circulation. A serious book by David Graham Phillips, published serially in a popular monthly, is raided the moment it appears between covers; a trashy piece of nastiness by Elinor Glyn goes unmolested. Worse, books are sold for months and even years without protest, and then suddenly attacked: Dreiser's *The "Genius,"* Kreymborg's *Edna* and Forel's *The Sexual Question* are examples. Still worse, what is held to be unobjectionable in one state is forbidden in another as *contra bonos mores*.[19] Altogether,

[14] U.S. *vs.* Bennett, 16 Blatchford, 368-9 (1877).

[15] *Idem*, 362; People *vs.* Muller, 96 N. Y., 411; U.S. *vs. Clark*, 38 Fed. Rep. 734.

[16] U.S. *vs.* Moore, 129 Fed., 160-1 (1904).

[17] U.S. *vs.* Heywood, judges charge, Boston, 1877. Quoted in U.S. *vs.* Bennett, 16 Blatchford.

[18] *A Book of Prefaces*, pp. 263-265.

[19] The chief sufferers from this conflict are the authors of moving pictures. What they face at the hands of imbecile State boards of censorship is

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there is madness, and no method in it. The livelihoods and good names of hard-striving and decent men are at the mercy of the whims of a horde of fanatics and mountebanks, and they have no way of securing themselves against attack, and no redress for their loss when it comes.[20]

It was no wonder, Mencken wrote, that American literature down to World War I was primarily remarkable for its artificiality. He compared our fiction to eighteenth-century poetry; it was just as conventional and artificial, just as far removed from reality. In America, and probably only here, could an obvious piece of reporting like Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* create a sensation, or Dreiser's *Jennie Gerhardt* evoke such astonishment and rage. As an editor of the *Smart Set* Mencken was fully aware of the dangers lying in the path of any publisher who attempted to give his readers quality writing. Since his magazine was frankly addressed to a sophisticated minority, sold for a relatively high price, and contained no pictures or other baits for the childish, Mencken assumed that "its readers are not sex-curious and itching adolescents, just as my colleague of the *Atlantic Monthly* may assume reasonably that his readers are not Italian immigrants." Nevertheless, he was constantly forced to keep the comstocks in mind while reading a manuscript sent him by an author. He warned his contributors, though he never admitted this publicly, to be sure to keep clothes on their female characters at all times. Mencken was a man marked by the Puritan elements in the country, and he knew it. But he certainly possessed nothing resembling a martyr complex. As he wrote Dreiser in 1921, the joy of living in America "does not lie in playing chopping-block for the sanctified, but in outraging them and getting away with it. To this enterprise I address myself. Some day they may fetch me, but it will be a hard sweat."

ALTHOUGH OUR LITERATURE was policed and picketed by a small band of comstocks, the fact remains that the American people offered little resistance; they were perfectly willing to be led by their noses like so many cattle. The American was "school-mastered out of gusto, out of joy, out of innocence." He could in no way understand William Blake's belief that "the lust of the goat is also to the glory of God." When the comstocks examined *The "Genius"* to determine its harmful effect on immature female readers, they tacitly admitted, Mencken wrote, that "to be curious is to be lewd; to know is to yield to fornication." The medieval doctrine that woman is depraved was, and, for that matter, still is widely accepted in our own century. The right-thinking man must do all he can to save her from her innate depravity. "The 'locks of chastity' rust in the Cluny Museum: in place of them we have comstockery. . . ." Though censorship is nothing like so powerful today as it was forty years ago, and we must credit Mencken with having done much to deprive the censors of their power, there are still numerous evidences of the puritanical perversion. The most cursory look at television, for example, will provide the spectator with enough sadism to last a lifetime, but it is still impossible to portray a normal sex relationship in any way even resembling a realistic manner. It is also ironic that Roman Catholic censors, particularly the Legion of Decency, have taken up where the more nearly pure descendants of New England Puritanism left off. Once the object of Puritan prejudice, the Catholic Church now wields the whip in many areas of the country. Boston, now a Catholic stronghold, remains the laughing-stock of the nation. What hungry young novelist doesn't nightly pray that his latest book will receive the free advertising that goes with being banned in Boston?

described at length by Channing Pollock in an article entitled, "Swinging the Censor," in the *Bulletin of the Author's League of America* for March, 1917.

[20] *A Book of Prefaces*, pp. 273-274.

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NEW BOOKS AND ARTICLES

THE FOLLOWING IS A SELECT LIST OF BOOKS AND ARTICLES WHICH, IN THE OPINION OF THE EDITORS, MAY BE OF INTEREST TO OUR READERS.

Milton Friedman and Anna J. Schwartz, *A Monetary History of the United States,* 1867-1960. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1963. $15.00. A mammoth study of the history of United States monetary policies and the money supply since the Civil War.

H. L. A. Hart, *Law, Liberty, and Morality.* Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1963. $3.00. A largely successful attack on the Conservative position espoused by Sir Patrick Devlin (and in the nineteenth century by James Fitzjames Stephen) that "society" has the right to enforce "its" moral code against dissenters, even in the absence of direct injury to innocent parties.

Two books of note have appeared recently by W. H. Hutt, distinguished economist of the University of Capetown, South Africa, and a consistent opponent of the policies of apartheid: *The Economics of the Colour Bar.* London, Andre Deutsch, 1964. 5 shillings, paper. His theme is that "the restrictionist policies arising from the racialist doctrines of the Nationalist Government and the efforts of the higher-paid workers to protect privileged positions in the labour market would not have been possible had the economy been run on competitive lines. But this has not happened because investors and managements have been intimidated by politicians wielding the planning powers of the state." Available from the publisher at 105 Great Russell St., London, W.C.1, England. And: *Keynesianism—Retrospect and Prospect.* Chicago, Regnery, 1963. $7.50. A major contribution to the body of anti-Keynesian literature. Professor Hutt supplies an impressive amount of factual and theoretical economic evidence for his arguments.

George J. Stigler, *The Intellectual and the Market Place and Other Essays.* New York, The Free Press of Glencoe, 1963. $2.50. A collection of highly readable essays on economic and political topics. The title essay should be familiar to NIR readers.

Ernest van den Haag, *Passion and Social Constraint.* New York, Stein and Day, 1963. $6.95. A new work by one of the foremost contemporary conservative sociologists, discussing the problems raised by the fact of limitation from the viewpoint of the fields of anthropology, sociology, and psychoanalysis.

Alfred Avins, "Freedom of Choice in Personal Service Occupations: 13th Amendment Limitations on Antidiscrimination Legislation," *Cornell Law Quarterly,* Winter 1964, pp. 228-256. An historical survey of antidiscrimination legislation and its human limitations, tending slightly to the polemical; but well reasoned and well documented.

William Letwin, "What's Wrong with Planning: The Case of India," *Fortune,* June 1963, pp. 118 ff. An illustrative discussion of the problems India now faces because of central planning and public ownership.

Jesse W. Markham, "Anti-Trust Trends and New Constraints," *Harvard Business Review,* May-June 1963, pp. 84-92. A detached survey of recent antitrust developments which look less like attempts to foster competition and more and more like protectionism.

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AS A MAGAZINE . . .

reaches maturity in the publication field it is often blessed with the growth of a loyal and dedicated following. This hard core of zealots will stick with a magazine through thick and thin, hard times and good. NIR is fortunate in having a larger percentage of these "hard core" readers than the average periodical. We would like to present here a sampling of the encouraging praise and constructive criticism we have received over the past few months:

"Your recent issue on the Federal Regulatory Bureaus was well written and very informative. I just wanted to let you know that we have passed a resolution abolishing the ICC in our neighborhood."

"The publishing policies of your periodical have brought a new meaning to the word 'quarterly' in American magazine circles."

"As one of the more responsible extremist publications, NIR is, I feel, a valuable contributor to the Great Conversation and to the world's store of Great Ideas. Mankind needs NIR; mankind needs the vigor which NIR lends to dialogues between peoples. The fact that sometimes you do go just a bit far out sometimes—like selling the lighthouses, really!—does not in any way diminish your service or, as Sir Servapali Chutney was fond of putting it, your 'contribution,' to humanity."

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"Leafing through back issues of NIR, I came across Mr. Hurt's 'Sin and the Criminal Law.' It is good to see a member of the responsible right who believes that moderation in pursuit of vice is no virtue."

NEW INDIVIDUALIST REVIEW 11

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Society lives and acts only in individuals . . . Everyone carries a part of society on his shoulders; no one is relieved of his share of responsibility by others. And no one can find a safe way for himself if society is sweeping toward destruction. Therefore everyone, in his own interests, must thrust himself vigorously into the intellectual battle. None can stand aside with unconcern; the interests of everyone hang on the result. Whether he chooses or not, every man is drawn into the great historical struggle, the decisive battle (between freedom and slavery) into which our epoch has plunged us.

—Ludwig Von Mises

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